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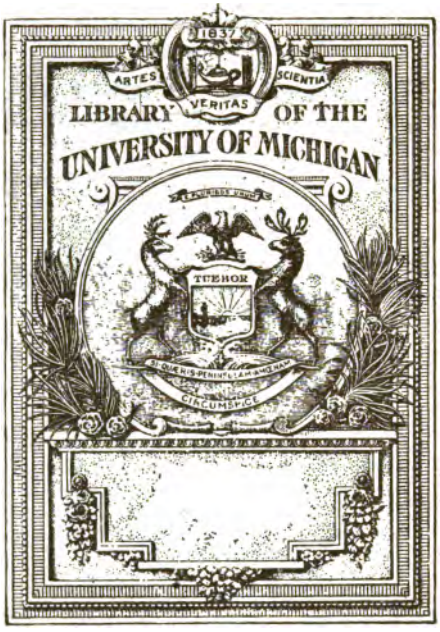
M. DE CAMORS

OCTAVE FEUILLET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Crowned by the French Academy

Octave Feuillet

With a Preface by MAXIME DU CAMP, of the French Academy

[From an Original Etching by Ruysdael.]

NEW YORK

1910

Monsieur de Camors

(*MONSIEUR DE CAMORS*)

By OCTAVE FEUILLET

Crowned by the French Academy

With a Preface by MAXIME DU CAMP, of the French Academy

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1910

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OCTAVE FEUILLET

OCTAVE FEUILLET'S works abound with rare qualities, forming a harmonious ensemble; they also exhibit great observation and knowledge of humanity, and through all of them runs an incomparable and distinctive charm. He will always be considered the leader of the idealistic school in the nineteenth century. It is now fifteen years since his death, and the judgment of posterity is that he had a great imagination, linked to great analytical power and insight; that his style is neat, pure, and fine, and at the same time brilliant and concise. He unites suppleness with force, he combines grace with vigor.

Octave Feuillet was born at Saint-Lô (Manche), August 11, 1821, his father occupying the post of Secretary-General of the Prefecture de la Manche. Pupil at the Lycée Louis le Grand, he received many prizes, and was entered for the law. But he became early attracted to literature, and like many of the writers at that period attached himself to the "romantic school." He collaborated with Alexander Dumas *père* and with Paul Bocage. It can not now be ascertained what share Feuillet may have had in any of the countless tales of the elder Dumas. Under his own name he published

the novels *Onesta* and *Alix*, in 1846, his first romances. He then commenced writing for the stage. We mention *Echec et Mat* (Odéon, 1846); *Palma, ou la Nuit du Vendredi-Saint* (Porte St. Martin, 1847); *La Vieillesse de Richelieu* (Théâtre Français, 1848); *York* (Palais Royal, 1852). Some of them are written in collaboration with Paul Bocage. They are dramas of the Dumas type, conventional, not without cleverness, but making no lasting mark.

Realizing this, Feuillet halted, pondered, abruptly changed front, and began to follow in the footsteps of Alfred de Musset. *La Grise* (1854), *Le Village* (1856), *Dalila* (1857), *Le Cheveu Blanc*, and other plays obtained great success, partly in the Gymnase, partly in the Comédie Française. In these works Feuillet revealed himself as an analyst of feminine character, as one who had spied out all their secrets, and could pour balm on all their wounds. *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre* (Vaudeville, 1858) is probably the best known of all his later dramas; it was, of course, adapted for the stage from his romance, and is well known to the American public through Lester Wallack and Pierrepont Edwards. *Tentation* was produced in the year 1860, also well known in this country under the title *Led Astray;* then followed *Montjoye* (1863), etc. The influence of Alfred de Musset is henceforth less perceptible. Feuillet now became a follower of Dumas *fils*, especially so in *La Belle au Bois Dormant* (Vaudeville, 1865); *Le Cas de Conscience* (Théâtre Français, 1867); *Julie* (Théâtre Français 1869). These met with success, and are still in the repertoire of the Comédie Française.

PREFACE

As a romancer, Feuillet occupies a high place. For thirty years he was the representative of a noble and tender genre, and was preëminently the favorite novelist of the brilliant society of the Second Empire. Women literally devoured him, and his feminine public has always remained faithful to him. He is the advocate of morality and of the aristocracy of birth and feeling, though under this disguise he involves his heroes and heroines in highly romantic complications, whose outcome is often for a time in doubt. Yet as the accredited painter of the Faubourg Saint-Germain he contributed an essential element to the development of realistic fiction. No one has rendered so well as he the high-strung, neuropathic women of the upper class, who neither understand themselves nor are wholly comprehensible to others. In *Monsieur de Camors*, crowned by the Academy, he has yielded to the demands of a stricter realism. Especially after the fall of the Empire had removed a powerful motive for gilding the vices of aristocratic society, he painted its hard and selfish qualities as none of his contemporaries could have done.

Octave Feuillet was elected to the Académie Française in 1862 to succeed Scribe. He died December 29, 1890.

de l'Académie Française.

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MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

CHAPTER I

"THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH"

EAR eleven o'clock, one evening in the month of May, a man about fifty years of age, well formed, and of noble carriage, stepped from a coupé in the courtyard of a small hotel in the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. He ascended, with the walk of a master, the steps leading to the entrance, to the hall where several servants awaited him. One of them followed him into an elegant study on the first floor, which communicated with a handsome bedroom, separated from it by a curtained arch. The valet arranged the fire, raised the lamps in both rooms, and was about to retire, when his master spoke:

"Has my son returned home?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte. Monsieur is not ill?"

"Ill! Why?"

"Because Monsieur le Comte is so pale."

"Ah! It is only a slight cold I have taken this evening on the banks of the lake."

"Will Monsieur require anything?"

"Nothing," replied the Count briefly, and the servant retired. Left alone, his master approached a cabinet curiously carved in the Italian style, and took from it a long flat ebony box.

This contained two pistols. He loaded them with great care, adjusting the caps by pressing them lightly to the nipple with his thumb. That done, he lighted a cigar, and for half an hour the muffled beat of his regular tread sounded on the carpet of the gallery. He finished his cigar, paused a moment in deep thought, and then entered the adjoining room, taking the pistols with him.

This room, like the other, was furnished in a style of severe elegance, relieved by tasteful ornament. It showed some pictures by famous masters, statues, bronzes, and rare carvings in ivory. The Count threw a glance of singular interest round the interior of this chamber, which was his own—on the familiar objects—on the sombre hangings—on the bed, prepared for sleep. Then he turned toward a table, placed in a recess of the window, laid the pistols upon it, and dropping his head in his hands, meditated deeply many minutes. Suddenly he raised his head, and wrote rapidly as follows:

"To my Son:

"Life wearies me, my son, and I shall relinquish it. The true superiority of man over the inert or passive creatures that surround him, lies in his power to free himself, at will, from those pernicious servitudes which are termed the laws of nature. Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must. Reflect, my son, upon this text, for all human power lies in it.

"Science asserts and demonstrates it. Man, intelligent and free, is an animal wholly unpremeditated upon this planet. Produced by unexpected combinations and haphazard transformations, in the midst of a general subordination of matter, he figures as a dissonance and a revolt!

"Nature has engendered without having conceived him. The result is as if a turkey-hen had unconsciously hatched the egg of an eagle. Terrified at the monster, she has sought to control it, and has overloaded it with instincts, commonly called duties, and police regulations known as religion. Each one of these shackles broken, each one of these servitudes overthrown, marks a step toward the thorough emancipation of humanity.

"I must say to you, however, that I die in the faith of my century, believing in matter uncreated, all-powerful, and eternal—the Nature of the ancients. There have been in all ages philosophers who have had conceptions of the truth. But ripe to-day, it has become the common property of all who are strong enough to stand it—for, in sooth, this latest religion of humanity is food fit only for the strong. It carries sadness with it, for it isolates man; but it also involves grandeur, making man absolutely free, or, as it were, a very god. It leaves him no actual duties except to himself, and it opens a superb field to one of brain and courage.

"The masses still remain, and must ever remain, submissive under the yoke of old, dead religions, and under the tyranny of instincts. There will still be seen very much the same condition of things as at present in Paris; a society the brain of which is atheistic, and the heart religious. And at bottom there will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter; nevertheless, churches will continue to be built mechanically. There are no longer even Deists; for the old chimera of a personal, moral God—witness, sanction, and judge, —is virtually extinct; and yet hardly a word is said, or a line written, or a gesture made, in public or private life, which does not ever affirm that chimera. This may have its uses perchance, but it is nevertheless despicable. Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself, and write your own catechism upon a virgin page.

"As for myself, my life has been a failure, because I was born many years too soon. As yet the earth and the heavens were heaped up and cumbered with ruins, and people did not see. Science, moreover, was relatively still in its infancy. And, besides, I retained the prejudices and the repugnance to the doctrines of the new world that belonged to my name. I was unable to comprehend that there was anything better to be done than childishly to pout at the conqueror; that is, I could not recognize that his weapons were good, and that I should seize and destroy him with them. In short, for want of a definite principle of action I have drifted at random, my life without plan—I have been a mere trivial man of pleasure.

"Your life shall be more complete, if you will only follow my advice.

"What, indeed, may not a man of this age become if he have the good sense and energy to conform his life rigidly to his belief!

"I merely state the question, you must solve it; I can leave you only some cursory ideas, which I am satisfied are just, and upon which you may meditate at your leisure. Only for fools or the weak does materialism become a debasing dogma; assuredly, in its code there are none of those precepts of ordinary morals which our fathers entitled virtue; but I do find there a grand word which may well counterbalance many others, that is to say, Honor, self-esteem! Unquestionably a materialist may not be a saint; but he can be a gentleman, which is something. You have happy gifts, my son, and I know of but one duty that you have in the world—that of developing those gifts to the utmost, and through them to enjoy life unsparingly. Therefore, without scruple, use woman for your pleasure, man for your advancement; but under no circumstances do anything ignoble.

"In order that *ennui* shall not drive you, like myself, prematurely from the world so soon as the season for pleasure shall have ended, you should leave the emotions of ambition and of public life for the gratification of your riper age. Do not enter into any engagements with the reigning government, and reserve for yourself to hear its eulogium made by those who will have subverted it. That is the

French fashion. Each generation must have its own prey. You will soon feel the impulse of the coming generation. Prepare yourself, from afar, to take the lead in it.

"In politics, my son, you are not ignorant that we all take our principles from our temperament. The bilious are demagogues, the sanguine, democrats, the nervous, aristocrats. You are both sanguine and nervous, an excellent constitution, for it gives you a choice. You may, for example, be an aristocrat in regard to yourself personally, and, at the same time, a democrat in relation to others; and in that you will not be exceptional.

"Make yourself master of every question likely to interest your contemporaries, but do not become absorbed in any yourself. In reality, all principles are indifferent—true or false according to the hour and circumstance. Ideas are mere instruments with which you should learn to play seasonably, so as to sway men. In that path, likewise, you will have associates.

"Know, my son, that having attained my age, weary of all else, you will have need of strong sensations. The sanguinary diversions of revolution will then be for you the same as a love-affair at twenty.

"But I am fatigued, my son, and shall recapitulate. To be loved by women, to be feared by men, to be as impassive and as imperturbable as a god before the tears of the one and the blood of the other, and to end in a whirlwind—such has been the lot in which I have failed, but which, nevertheless, I bequeath to you. With your great faculties you, however, are capable of accomplishing it, unless indeed you should fail through some ingrained weakness of the heart that I have noticed in you, and which, doubtless, you have imbibed with your mother's milk.

"So long as man shall be born of woman, there will be something faulty and incomplete in his character. In fine, strive to relieve yourself from all thraldom, from all natural instincts, affections, and sympathies as from so many fetters upon your liberty, your strength.

"Do not marry unless some superior interest shall impel you to do so. In that event, have no children.

"Have no intimate friends. Cæsar having grown old, had a friend. It was Brutus!

"Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom.

"Change somewhat your style of fencing, it is altogether too open, my son. Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep. Adieu.

"CAMORS."

The feeble rays of dawn had passed through the slats of the blinds. The matin birds began their song in the chestnut-tree near the window. M. de Camors raised his head and listened in an absent mood to the sound which astonished him. Seeing that it was daybreak, he folded in some haste the pages he had just finished, pressed his seal upon the envelope, and addressed it, "For the Comte Louis de Camors." Then he rose.

M. de Camors was a great lover of art, and had carefully preserved a magnificent ivory carving of the sixteenth century, which had belonged to his wife. It was a Christ —the pallid white relieved by a medallion of dark velvet.

His eye, meeting this pale, sad image, was attracted to it for a moment with strange fascination. Then he smiled bitterly, seized one of the pistols with a firm hand and pressed it to his temple.

A shot resounded through the house; the fall of a heavy body shook the floor—fragments of brains strewed the carpet. The Comte de Camors had plunged into eternity!

His last will was clenched in his hand.

To whom was this document addressed? Upon what kind of soil will these seeds fall?

At this time Louis de Camors was twenty-seven years old. His mother had died young. It did not appear that she had been particularly happy with her husband; and her son barely remembered her as a young woman, pretty and pale, and frequently weeping, who used to sing him to sleep in a low, sweet voice. He had been brought up chiefly by his father's mistress, who was known as the Vicomtesse d'Oilly, a widow, and a rather good sort of woman. Her natural sensibility, and the laxity of morals then reigning at Paris, permitted her to occupy herself at the same time with the happiness of the father and the education of the son. When the father deserted her after a time, he left her the child, to comfort her somewhat by this mark of confidence and affection. She took him out three times a week; she dressed him and combed him; she fondled him and took him with her to church, and made him play with a handsome Spaniard, who had been for some time her secretary. Besides, she neglected no opportunity of inculcating precepts of sound morality. Thus the child, being surprised at seeing her one evening press a kiss upon the forehead of her secretary, cried out, with the blunt candor of his age:

"Why, Madame, do you kiss a gentleman who is not your husband?"

"Because, my dear," replied the Countess, "our good Lord commands us to be charitable and affectionate to the poor, the infirm, and the exile; and Monsieur Perez is an exile."

Louis de Camors merited better care, for he was a generous-hearted child; and his comrades of the col-

lege of Louis-le-Grand always remembered the warm-heartedness and natural grace which made them forgive his successes during the week, and his varnished boots and lilac gloves on Sunday. Toward the close of his college course, he became particularly attached to a poor bursar, by name Lescande, who excelled in mathematics, but who was very ungraceful, awkwardly shy and timid, with a painful sensitiveness to the peculiarities of his person. He was nicknamed "Wolf-head," from the refractory nature of his hair; but the elegant Camors stopped the scoffers by protecting the young man with his friendship. Lescande felt this deeply, and adored his friend, to whom he opened the inmost recesses of his heart, letting out some important secrets.

He loved a very young girl who was his cousin, but was as poor as himself. Still it was a providential thing for him that she was poor, otherwise he never should have dared to aspire to her. It was a sad occurrence that had first thrown Lescande with his cousin—the loss of her father, who was chief of one of the Departments of State.

After his death she lived with her mother in very straitened circumstances; and Lescande, on occasion of his last visit, found her with soiled cuffs. Immediately after he received the following note:

"Pardon me, dear cousin! Pardon my not wearing white cuffs. But I must tell you that we can change our cuffs—my mother and I —only three times a week. As to her, one would never discover it. *She* is neat as a bird. I also try to be; but, alas! when I practise

the piano, my cuffs rub. After this explanation, my good Theodore, I hope you will love me as before.

"JULIETTE."

Lescande wept over this note. Luckily he had his prospects as an architect; and Juliette had promised to wait for him ten years, by which time he would either be dead, or living deliciously in a humble house with his cousin. He showed the note, and unfolded his plans to Camors. "This is the only ambition I have, or which I can have," added Lescande. "You are different. You are born for great things."

"Listen, my old Lescande," replied Camors, who had just passed his rhetoric examination in triumph. "I do not know but that my destiny may be ordinary; but I am sure my heart can never be. There I feel transports—passions, which give me sometimes great joy, sometimes inexpressible suffering. I burn to discover a world—to save a nation—to love a queen! I understand nothing but great ambitions and noble alliances, and as for sentimental love, it troubles me but little. My activity pants for a nobler and a wider field!

"I intend to attach myself to one of the great social parties, political or religious, that agitate the world at this era. Which one I know not yet, for my opinions are not very fixed. But as soon as I leave college I shall devote myself to seeking the truth. And truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers.

"Besides, Paris is an intellectual highway, so brilliantly lighted it is only necessary to open one's eyes and have good faith and independence, to find the true road.

And I am in excellent case for this, for though born a gentleman, I have no prejudices. My father, who is himself very enlightened and very liberal, leaves me free. I have an uncle who is a Republican; an aunt who is a Legitimist—and what is still more, a saint; and another uncle who is a Conservative. It is not vanity that leads me to speak of these things; but only a desire to show you that, having a foot in all parties, I am quite willing to compare them dispassionately and make a good choice. Once master of the holy truth, you may be sure, dear old Lescande, I shall serve it unto death—with my tongue, with my pen, and with my sword!"

Such sentiments as these, pronounced with sincere emotion and accompanied by a warm clasp of the hand, drew tears from the old Lescande, otherwise called Wolfhead.

CHAPTER II

FRUIT FROM THE HOTBED OF PARIS

ARLY one morning, about eight years after these high resolves, Louis de Camors rode out from the *porte-cochère* of the small hotel he had occupied with his father.

Nothing could be gayer than Paris was that morning, at that charming golden hour of the day when the world seems peopled only with good and generous spirits who love one another. Paris does not pique herself on her generosity; but she still takes to herself at this charming hour an air of innocence, cheerfulness, and amiable cordiality.

The little carts with bells, that pass one another rapidly, make one believe the country is covered with roses. The cries of old Paris cut with their sharp notes the deep murmur of a great city just awaking.

You see the jolly *concierges* sweeping the white footpaths; half-dressed merchants taking down their shutters with great noise; and groups of ostlers, in Scotch caps, smoking and fraternizing on the hotel steps.

You hear the questions of the sociable neighborhood; the news proper to awakening; speculations on the weather bandied across from door to door, with much interest.

Young milliners, a little late, walk briskly toward town with elastic step, making now a short pause before a shop just opened; again taking wing like a bee just scenting a flower.

Even the dead in this gay Paris morning seem to go gayly to the cemetery, with their jovial coachmen grinning and nodding as they pass.

Superbly aloof from these agreeable impressions, Louis de Camors, a little pale, with half-closed eyes and a cigar between his teeth, rode into the Rue de Bourgogne at a walk, broke into a canter on the Champs Elysées, and galloped thence to the Bois. After a brisk run, he returned by chance through the Porte Maillot, then not nearly so thickly inhabited as it is to-day. Already, however, a few pretty houses, with green lawns in front, peeped out from the bushes of lilac and clematis. Before the green railings of one of these a gentleman played hoop with a very young, blond-haired child. His age belonged in that uncertain area which may range from twenty-five to forty. He wore a white cravat, spotless as snow; and two triangles of short, thick beard, cut like the boxwood at Versailles, ornamented his cheeks. If Camors saw this personage he did not honor him with the slightest notice. He was, notwithstanding, his former comrade Lescande, who had been lost sight of for several years by his warmest college friend. Lescande, however, whose memory seemed better, felt his heart leap with joy at the majestic appearance of the young cavalier who approached him. He made a movement to rush forward; a smile covered his good-natured face, but it ended in a grimace. Evi-

dently he had been forgotten. Camors, now not more than a couple of feet from him, was passing on, and his handsome countenance gave not the slightest sign of emotion. Suddenly, without changing a single line of his face, he drew rein, took the cigar from his lips, and said, in a tranquil voice:

"Hello! You have no longer a wolfhead!"

"Ha! Then you know me?" cried Lescande.

"Know you? Why not?"

"I thought — I was afraid — on account of my beard——"

"Bah! your beard does not change you—except that it becomes you. But what are you doing here?"

"Doing here! Why, my dear friend, I am at home here. Dismount, I pray you, and come into my house."

"Well, why not?" replied Camors, with the same voice and manner of supreme indifference; and, throwing his bridle to the servant who followed him, he passed through the garden-gate, led, supported, caressed by the trembling hand of Lescande.

The garden was small, but beautifully tended and full of rare plants. At the end, a small villa, in the Italian style, showed its graceful porch.

"Ah, that is pretty!" exclaimed Camors, at last.

"And you recognize my plan, Number Three, do you not?" asked Lescande, eagerly.

"Your plan Number Three? Ah, yes, perfectly," replied Camors, absently. "And your pretty little cousin—is she within?"

"She is there, my dear friend," answered Lescande, in a low voice—and he pointed to the closed shutters of

a large window of a balcony surmounting the veranda. "She is there; and this is our son."

Camors let his hand pass listlessly over the child's hair. "The deuce!" he said; "but you have not wasted time. And you are happy, my good fellow?"

"So happy, my dear friend, that I am sometimes uneasy, for the good God is too kind to me. It is true, though, I had to work very hard. For instance, I passed two years in Spain—in the mountains of that infernal country. There I built a fairy palace for the Marquis of Buena-Vista, a great nobleman, who had seen my plan at the Exhibition and was delighted with it. This was the beginning of my fortune; but you must not imagine that my profession alone has enriched me so quickly. I made some successful speculations—some unheard-of chances in lands; and, I beg you to believe, honestly, too. Still, I am not a millionaire; but you know I had nothing, and my wife less; now, my house paid for, we have ten thousand francs' income left. It is not a fortune for us, living in this style; but I still work and keep good courage, and my Juliette is happy in her paradise!"

"She wears no more soiled cuffs, then?" said Camors.

"I warrant she does not! Indeed, she has a slight tendency to luxury—like all women, you know. But I am delighted to see you remember so well our college follies. I also, through all my distractions, never forgot you a moment. I even had a foolish idea of asking you to my wedding, only I did not dare. You are so brilliant, so petted, with your establishment and your racers. My wife knows you very well; in fact, we have

talked of you a hundred thousand times. Since she patronizes the turf and subscribes for *The Sport*, she says to me, 'Your friend's horse has won again'; and in our family circle we rejoice over your triumphs."

A flush tinged the cheek of Camors as he answered, quietly, "You are really too good."

They walked a moment in silence over the gravel path bordered by grass, before Lescande spoke again.

"And yourself, dear friend, I hope that you also are happy."

"I—happy!" Camors seemed a little astonished. "My happiness is simple enough, but I believe it is unclouded. I rise in the morning, ride to the Bois, thence to the club, go to the Bois again, and then back to the club. If there is a first representation at any theatre, I wish to see it. Thus, last evening they gave a new piece which was really exquisite. There was a song in it, beginning:

"He was a woodpecker,
A little woodpecker,
A young woodpecker——

and the chorus imitated the cry of the woodpecker! Well, it was charming, and the whole of Paris will sing that song with delight for a year. I also shall do like the whole of Paris, and I shall be happy."

"Good heavens! my friend," laughed Lescande, "and that suffices you for happiness?"

"That and—the principles of 'eighty-nine," replied Camors, lighting a fresh cigar from the old one.

Here their dialogue was broken by the fresh voice of a woman calling from the blinds of the balcony——

"Is that you, Theodore?"

Camors raised his eyes and saw a white hand, resting on the slats of the blind, bathed in sunlight.

"That is my wife. Conceal yourself!" cried Lescande, briskly; and he pushed Camors behind a clump of catalpas, as he turned to the balcony and lightly answered——

"Yes, my dear; do you wish anything?"

"Maxime is with you?"

"Yes, mother. I am here," cried the child. "It is a beautiful morning. Are you quite well?"

"I hardly know. I have slept too long, I believe." She opened the shutters, and, shading her eyes from the glare with her hand, appeared on the balcony.

She was in the flower of youth, slight, supple, and graceful, and appeared, in her ample morning-gown of blue cashmere, plumper and taller than she really was. Bands of the same color interlaced, in the Greek fashion, her chestnut hair—which nature, art, and the night had dishevelled—waved and curled to admiration on her small head.

She rested her elbows on the railing, yawned, showing her white teeth, and looking at her husband, asked:

"Why do you look so stupid?"

At the instant she observed Camors—whom the interest of the moment had withdrawn from his concealment—gave a startled cry, gathered up her skirts, and retired within the room.

Since leaving college up to this hour, Louis de Camors had never formed any great opinion of the Juliet who had taken Lescande as her Romeo. He experienced a

flash of agreeable surprise on discovering that his friend was more happy in that respect than he had supposed.

"I am about to be scolded, my friend," said Lescande, with a hearty laugh, "and you also must stay for your share. You will stay and breakfast with us?"

Camors hesitated; then said, hastily, "No, no! Impossible! I have an engagement which I must keep."

Notwithstanding Camors's unwillingness, Lescande detained him until he had extorted a promise to come and dine with them—that is, with him, his wife, and his mother-in-law, Madame Mursois—on the following Tuesday. This acceptance left a cloud on the spirit of Camors until the appointed day. Besides abhorring family dinners, he objected to being reminded of the scene of the balcony. The indiscreet kindness of Lescande both touched and irritated him; for he knew he should play but a silly part near this pretty woman. He felt sure she was a coquette, notwithstanding which, the recollections of his youth and the character of her husband should make her sacred to him. So he was not in the most agreeable frame of mind when he stepped out of his dog-cart, that Tuesday evening, before the little villa of the Avenue Maillot.

At his reception by Madame Lescande and her mother he took heart a little. They appeared to him what they were, two honest-hearted women, surrounded by luxury and elegance. The mother—an ex-beauty—had been left a widow when very young, and to this time had avoided any stain on her character. With them, innate delicacy held the place of those solid principles so little tolerated by French society. Like a few

other women of society, Madame had the quality of virtue just as ermine has the quality of whiteness. Vice was not so repugnant to her as an evil as it was as a blemish. Her daughter had received from her those instincts of chastity which are oftener than we imagine hidden under the appearance of pride. But these amiable women had one unfortunate caprice, not uncommon at this day among Parisians of their position. Although rather clever, they bowed down, with the adoration of *bourgeoises*, before that aristocracy, more or less pure, that paraded up and down the Champs Elysées, in the theatres, at the race-course, and on the most frequented promenades, its frivolous affairs and rival vanities.

Virtuous themselves, they read with interest the daintiest bits of scandal and the most equivocal adventures that took place among the *élite*. It was their happiness and their glory to learn the smallest details of the high life of Paris; to follow its feasts, speak in its slang, copy its toilets, and read its favorite books. So that if not the rose, they could at least be near the rose and become impregnated with her colors and her perfumes. Such apparent familiarity heightened them singularly in their own estimation and in that of their associates.

Now, although Camors did not yet occupy that bright spot in the heaven of fashion which was surely to be his one day, still he could here pass for a demigod, and as such inspire Madame Lescande and her mother with a sentiment of most violent curiosity. His early intimacy with Lescande had always connected a peculiar interest with his name: and they knew the names of his horses —most likely knew the names of his mistresses.

So it required all their natural tact to conceal from their guest the flutter of their nerves caused by his sacred presence; but they did succeed, and so well that Camors was slightly piqued. If not a coxcomb, he was at least young: he was accustomed to please: he knew the Princess de Clam-Goritz had lately applied to him her learned definition of an agreeable man—"He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him!"

Consequently, it seemed a little strange to him that the simple mother of the simple wife of simple Lescande should be able to bear his radiance with such calmness; and this brought him out of his premeditated reserve.

He took the trouble to be irresistible—not to Madame Lescande, to whom he was studiously respectful—but to Madame Mursois. The whole evening he scattered around the mother the social epigrams intended to dazzle the daughter; Lescande meanwhile sitting with his mouth open, delighted with the success of his old schoolfellow.

Next afternoon, Camors, returning from his ride in the Bois, by chance passed the Avenue Maillot. Madame Lescande was embroidering on the balcony, by chance, and returned his salute over her tapestry. He remarked, too, that she saluted very gracefully, by a slight inclination of the head, followed by a slight movement of her symmetrical, sloping shoulders.

When he called upon her two or three days after—as was only his duty—Camors reflected on a strong resolution he had made to keep very cool, and to expatiate to Madame Lescande only on her husband's virtues. This pious resolve had an unfortunate effect; for Ma-

dame, whose virtue had been piqued, had also reflected; and while an obtrusive devotion had not failed to frighten her, this course only reassured her. So she gave up without restraint to the pleasure of receiving in her boudoir one of the brightest stars from the heaven of her dreams.

It was now May, and at the races of La Marche—to take place the following Sunday—Camors was to be one of the riders. Madame Mursois and her daughter prevailed upon Lescande to take them, while Camors completed their happiness by admitting them to the weighing-stand. Further, when they walked past the judge's stand, Madame Mursois, to whom he gave his arm, had the delight of being escorted in public by a cavalier in an orange jacket and top-boots. Lescande and his wife followed in the wake of the radiant mother-in-law, partaking of her ecstasy.

These agreeable relations continued for several weeks, without seeming to change their character. One day Camors would seat himself by the lady, before the palace of the Exhibition, and initiate her into the mysteries of all the fashionables who passed before them. Another time he would drop into their box at the opera, deign to remain there during an act or two, and correct their as yet incomplete views of the morals of the ballet. But in all these interviews he held toward Madame Lescande the language and manner of a brother: perhaps because he secretly persisted in his delicate resolve; perhaps because he was not ignorant that every road leads to Rome—and one as surely as another.

Madame Lescande reassured herself more and more;

and feeling it unnecessary to be on her guard, as at first, thought she might permit herself a little levity. No woman is flattered at being loved only as a sister.

Camors, a little disquieted by the course things were taking, made some slight effort to divert it. But, although men in fencing wish to spare their adversaries, sometimes they find habit too strong for them, and lunge home in spite of themselves. Besides, he began to be really interested in Madame Lescande—in her coquettish ways, at once artful and simple, provoking and timid, suggestive and reticent—in short, charming.

The same evening that M. de Camors, the elder, returned to his home bent on suicide, his son, passing up the Avenue Maillot, was stopped by Lescande on the threshold of his villa.

"My friend," said the latter, "as you are here you can do me a great favor. A telegram calls me suddenly to Melun—I must go on the instant. The ladies will be so lonely, pray stay and dine with them! I can't tell what the deuce ails my wife. She has been weeping all day over her tapestry; my mother-in-law has a headache. Your presence will cheer them. So stay, I beg you."

Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented. He sent back his horse, and his friend presented him to the ladies, whom the presence of the unexpected guest seemed to cheer a little. Lescande stepped into his carriage and departed, after receiving from his wife an embrace more fervent than usual.

The dinner was gay. In the atmosphere was that subtle suggestion of coming danger of which both Ca-

mors and Madame Lescande felt the exhilarating influence. Their excitement, as yet innocent, employed itself in those lively sallies—those brilliant combats at the barriers—that ever precede the more serious conflict. About nine o'clock the headache of Madame Mursois—perhaps owing to the cigar they had allowed Camors—became more violent. She declared she could endure it no longer, and must retire to her chamber. Camors wished to withdraw, but his carriage had not yet arrived and Madame Mursois insisted that he should wait for it.

"Let my daughter amuse you with a little music until then," she added.

Left alone with her guest, the younger lady seemed embarrassed. "What shall I play for you?" she asked, in a constrained voice, taking her seat at the piano.

"Oh! anything—play a waltz," answered Camors, absently.

The waltz finished, an awkward silence ensued. To break it she arose hesitatingly; then clasping her hands together exclaimed, "It seems to me there is a storm. Do you not think so?" She approached the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. In a second Camors was at her side.

The night was beautifully clear. Before them stretched the sombre shadow of the wood, while nearer trembling rays of moonlight slept upon the lawn.

How still all was! Their trembling hands met and for a moment did not separate.

"Juliette!" whispered the young man, in a low, broken voice. She shuddered, repelled the arm that

Camors passed round her, and hastily reëntered the room.

"Leave me, I pray you!" she cried, with an impetuous gesture of her hand, as she sank upon the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

Of course Camors did not obey. He seated himself by her.

In a little while Juliette awoke from her trance; but she awoke a lost woman!

How bitter was that awakening! She measured at a first glance the depth of the awful abyss into which she had suddenly plunged. Her husband, her mother, her infant, whirled like spectres in the mad chaos of her brain.

Sensible of the anguish of an irreparable wrong, she rose, passed her hand vacantly across her brow, and muttering, "Oh, God! oh, God!" peered vainly into the dark for light—hope—refuge! There was none!

Her tortured soul cast herself utterly on that of her lover. She turned her swimming eyes on him and said:

"How you must despise me!"

Camors, half kneeling on the carpet near her, kissed her hand indifferently and half raised his shoulders in sign of denial. "Is it not so?" she repeated. "Answer me, Louis."

His face wore a strange, cruel smile—"Do not insist on an answer, I pray you," he said.

"Then I am right? You do despise me?"

Camors turned himself abruptly full toward her,

looked straight in her face, and said, in a cold, hard voice, "I do!"

To this cruel speech the poor child replied by a wild cry that seemed to rend her, while her eyes dilated as if under the influence of strong poison. Camors strode across the room, then returned and stood by her as he said, in a quick, violent tone:

"You think I am brutal? Perhaps I am, but that can matter little now. After the irreparable wrong I have done you, there is one service—and only one—which I can now render you. I do it now, and tell you the truth. Understand me clearly; women who fall do not judge themselves more harshly than their accomplices judge them. For myself, what would you have me think of you?

"To his misfortune and my shame, I have known your husband since his boyhood. There is not a drop of blood in his veins that does not throb for you; there is not a thought of his day nor a dream of his night that is not yours; your every comfort comes from his sacrifices—your every joy from his exertion! See what *he* is to you!

"You have only seen my name in the journals; you have seen me ride by your window; I have talked a few times with you, and you yield to me in one moment the whole of his life with your own—the whole of his happiness with your own.

"I tell you, woman, every man like me, who abuses your vanity and your weakness and afterward tells you he esteems you—*lies!* And if after all you still believe he loves you, you do yourself fresh injury. No: we

soon learn to hate those irksome ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures; and the first effort after they are formed is to shatter them.

"As for the rest: women like you are not made for unholy love like ours. Their charm is their purity, and losing that, they lose everything. But it is a blessing to them to encounter one wretch, like myself, who dares to say—Forget me, forever! Farewell!"

He left her, passed from the room with rapid strides, and, slamming the door behind him, disappeared. Madame Lescande, who had listened, motionless, and pale as marble, remained in the same lifeless attitude, her eyes fixed, her hands clenched—yearning from the depths of her heart that death would summon her. Suddenly a singular noise, seeming to come from the next room, struck her ear. It was only a convulsive sob, or violent and smothered laughter. The wildest and most terrible ideas crowded to the mind of the unhappy woman; the foremost of them, that her husband had secretly returned, that he knew all—that his brain had given way, and that the laughter was the gibbering of his madness.

Feeling her own brain begin to reel, she sprang from the sofa, and rushing to the door, threw it open. The next apartment was the dining-room, dimly lighted by a hanging lamp. There she saw Camors, crouched upon the floor, sobbing furiously and beating his forehead against a chair which he strained in a convulsive embrace. Her tongue refused its office; she could find no word, but seating herself near him, gave way to her emotion, and wept silently. He dragged himself nearer,

seized the hem of her dress and covered it with kisses; his breast heaved tumultuously, his lips trembled and he gasped the almost inarticulate words, "Pardon! Oh, pardon me!"

This was all. Then he rose suddenly, rushed from the house, and the instant after she heard the rolling of the wheels as his carriage whirled him away.

If there were no morals and no remorse, French people would perhaps be happier. But unfortunately it happens that a young woman, who believes in little, like Madame Lescande, and a young man who believes in nothing, like M. de Camors, can not have the pleasures of an independent code of morals without suffering cruelly afterward.

A thousand old prejudices, which they think long since buried, start up suddenly in their consciences; and these revived scruples are nearly fatal to them.

Camors rushed toward Paris at the greatest speed of his thoroughbred, Fitz-Aymon, awakening along the route, by his elegance and style, sentiments of envy which would have changed to pity were the wounds of the heart visible. Bitter weariness, disgust of life and disgust for himself, were no new sensations to this young man; but he never had experienced them in such poignant intensity as at this cursed hour, when flying from the dishonored hearth of the friend of his boyhood. No action of his life had ever thrown such a flood of light on the depths of his infamy in doing such gross outrage to the friend of his purer days, to the dear confidant of the generous thoughts and proud aspirations of his youth. He knew he had trampled all these under foot.

Like Macbeth, he had not only murdered one asleep, but had murdered sleep itself.

His reflections became insupportable. He thought successively of becoming a monk, of enlisting as a soldier, and of getting drunk—ere he reached the corner of the Rue Royale and the Boulevard. Chance favored his last design, for as he alighted in front of his club, he found himself face to face with a pale young man, who smiled as he extended his hand. Camors recognized the Prince d'Errol.

"The deuce! You here, my Prince! I thought you in Cairo."

"I arrived only this morning."

"Ah, then you are better?—Your chest?"

"So-so."

"Bah! you look perfectly well. And isn't Cairo a strange place?"

"Rather; but I really believe Providence has sent you to me."

"You really think so, my Prince? But why?"

"Because—pshaw! I'll tell you by-and-bye; but first I want to hear all about your quarrel."

"What quarrel?"

"Your duel for Sarah."

"That is to say, against Sarah!"

"Well, tell me all that passed; I heard of it only vaguely while abroad."

"Well, I only strove to do a good action, and, according to custom, I was punished for it. I heard it said that that little imbecile La Brède borrowed money from his little sister to lavish it upon that Sarah. This was so

unnatural that you may believe it first disgusted, and then irritated me. One day at the club I could not resist saying, 'You are an ass, La Brède, to ruin yourself—worse than that, to ruin your sister, for the sake of a snail, as little sympathetic as Sarah, a girl who always has a cold in her head, and who has already deceived you.' 'Deceived me!' cried La Brède, waving his long arms. 'Deceived me! and with whom?' 'With me.' As he knew I never lied, he panted for my life. Luckily my life is a tough one."

"You put him in bed for three months, I hear."

"Almost as long as that, yes. And now, my friend, do me a service. I am a bear, a savage, a ghost! Assist me to return to life. Let us go and sup with some sprightly people whose virtue is extraordinary."

"Agreed! That is recommended by my physician."

"From Cairo? Nothing could be better, my Prince."

Half an hour later Louis de Camors, the Prince d'Errol, and a half-dozen guests of both sexes, took possession of an apartment, the closed doors of which we must respect.

Next morning, at gray dawn, the party was about to disperse; and at the moment a ragpicker, with a gray beard, was wandering up and down before the restaurant, raking with his hook in the refuse that awaited the public sweepers. In closing his purse, with an unsteady hand, Camors let fall a shining louis d'or, which rolled into the mud on the sidewalk. The ragpicker looked up with a timid smile.

"Ah! Monsieur," he said, "what falls into the trench should belong to the soldier."

"Pick it up with your teeth, then," answered Camors, laughing, "and it is yours."

The man hesitated, flushed under his sunburned cheeks, and threw a look of deadly hatred upon the laughing group round him. Then he knelt, buried his chest in the mire, and sprang up next moment with the coin clenched between his sharp white teeth. The spectators applauded. The chiffonnier smiled a dark smile, and turned away.

"Hello, my friend!" cried Camors, touching his arm, "would you like to earn five louis? If so, give me a knock-down blow. That will give you pleasure and do me good."

The man turned, looked him steadily in the eye, then suddenly dealt him such a blow in the face that he reeled against the opposite wall. The young men standing by made a movement to fall upon the graybeard.

"Let no one harm him!" cried Camors. "Here, my man, are your hundred francs."

"Keep them," replied the other, "I am paid;" and walked away.

"Bravo, Belisarius!" laughed Camors. "Faith, gentlemen, I do not know whether you agree with me, but I am really charmed with this little episode. I must go dream upon it. By-bye, young ladies! Good-day, Prince!"

An early cab was passing, he jumped in, and was driven rapidly to his hotel, on the Rue Babet-de-Jouy.

The door of the courtyard was open, but being still under the influence of the wine he had drunk, he failed to notice a confused group of servants and neighbors

standing before the stable-doors. Upon seeing him, these people became suddenly silent, and exchanged looks of sympathy and compassion. Camors occupied the second floor of the hotel; and ascending the stairs, found himself suddenly facing his father's valet. The man was very pale, and held a sealed paper, which he extended with a trembling hand.

"What is it, Joseph?" asked Camors.

"A letter which—which Monsieur le Comte wrote for you before he left."

"Before he left! my father is gone, then? But—where—how? What, the devil! why do you weep?"

Unable to speak, the servant handed him the paper. Camors seized it and tore it open.

"Good God! there is blood! what is this!" He read the first words—"My son, life is a burden to me. I leave it—" and fell fainting to the floor.

The poor lad loved his father, notwithstanding the past.

They carried him to his chamber.

CHAPTER III

DÉBRIS FROM THE REVOLUTION

LOUIS DE CAMORS, on leaving college, had entered upon life with a heart swelling with the virtues of youth—confidence, enthusiasm, sympathy. The horrible neglect of his early education had not corrupted in his veins those germs of weakness which, as his father declared, his mother's milk had deposited there; for that father, by shutting him up in a college to get rid of him for twelve years, had rendered him the greatest service in his power.

Those classic prisons surely do good. The healthy discipline of the school; the daily contact of young, fresh hearts; the long familiarity with the best works, powerful intellects, and great souls of the ancients—all these perhaps may not inspire a very rigid morality, but they do inspire a certain sentimental ideal of life and of duty which has its value.

The vague heroism which Camors first conceived he brought away with him. He demanded nothing, as you may remember, but the practical formula for the time and country in which he was destined to live. He found, doubtless, that the task he set himself was

more difficult than he had imagined; that the truth to which he would devote himself—but which he must first draw from the bottom of its well—did not stand upon many compliments. But he failed no preparation to serve her valiantly as a man might, as soon as she answered his appeal. He had the advantage of several years of opposing to the excitements of his age and of an opulent life the austere meditations of the poor student.

During that period of ardent, laborious youth, he faithfully shut himself up in libraries, attended public lectures, and gave himself a solid foundation of learning, which sometimes awakened surprise when discovered under the elegant frivolity of the gay turfman. But while arming himself for the battle of life, he lost, little by little, what was more essential than the best weapons—true courage.

In proportion as he followed Truth day by day, she flew before and eluded him, taking, like an unpleasant vision, the form of the thousand-headed Chimera.

About the middle of the last century, Paris was so covered with political and religious ruins, that the most piercing vision could scarcely distinguish the outlines of the fresh structures of the future. One could see that everything was overthrown; but one could not see any power that was to raise the ruins. Over the confused wrecks and remains of the Past, the powerful intellectual life of the Present—Progress—the collision of ideas—the flame of French wit—criticism and the sciences—threw a brilliant light, which, like the sun of earlier ages, illuminated the chaos

without making it productive. The phenomena of Life and of Death were commingled in one huge fermentation, in which everything decomposed and whence nothing seemed to spring up again.

At no period of history, perhaps, has Truth been less simple, more enveloped in complications; for it seemed that all essential notions of humanity had been fused in a great furnace, and none had come out whole.

The spectacle is grand; but it troubles profoundly all souls—or at least those that interest and curiosity do not suffice to fill; which is to say, nearly all. To disengage from this bubbling chaos one pure religious moral, one positive social idea, one fixed political creed, were an enterprise worthy of the most sincere. This should not be beyond the strength of a man of good intentions; and Louis de Camors might have accomplished the task had he been aided by better instruction and guidance.

It is the common misfortune of those just entering life to find in it less than their ideal. But in this respect Camors was born under a particularly unfortunate star, for he found in his surroundings—in his own family even—only the worst side of human nature; and, in some respects, of those very opinions to which he was tempted to adhere.

The Camors were originally from Brittany, where they had held, in the eighteenth century, large possessions, particularly some extensive forests, which still bear their name. The grandfather of Louis, the Comte Hervé de Camors, had, on his return from the emigration, bought back a small part of the hereditary

demesne. There he established himself in the old-fashioned style, and nourished until his death incurable prejudices against the French Revolution and against Louis XVIII.

Count Hervé had four children, two boys and two girls, and, feeling it his duty to protest against the levelling influences of the Civil Code, he established during his life, by a legal subterfuge, a sort of entail in favor of his eldest son, Charles-Henri, to the prejudice of Robert-Sosthène, Eléanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth, his other heirs. Eléanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth accepted with apparent willingness the act that benefited their brother at their expense—notwithstanding which they never forgave him. But Robert-Sosthène, who, in his position as representative of the younger branch, affected Liberal leanings and was besides loaded with debt, rebelled against the paternal procedure. He burned his visiting-cards, ornamented with the family crest and his name—"Chevalier Lange d'Ardennes"—and had others printed, simply "Dardennes, Junior (du Morbihan)."

Of these he sent a specimen to his father, and from that hour became a declared Republican.

There are people who attach themselves to a party by their virtues; others, again, by their vices. No recognized political party exists which does not contain some true principle; which does not respond to some legitimate aspiration of human society. At the same time, there is not one which can not serve as a pretext, as a refuge, and as a hope, for the basest passions of our nature.

The most advanced portion of the Liberal party of France is composed of generous spirits, ardent and absolute, who torture a really elevated ideal; that of a society of manhood, constituted with a sort of philosophic perfection; her own mistress each day and each hour; delegating few of her powers, and yielding none; living, not without laws, but without rulers; and, in short, developing her activity, her well-being, her genius, with that fulness of justice, of independence, and of dignity, which republicanism alone gives to all and to each one.

Every other system appears to them to preserve some of the slaveries and iniquities of former ages; and it also appears open to the suspicion of generating diverse interests—and often hostile ones—between the governors and the governed. They claim for all that political system which, without doubt, holds humanity in the most esteem; and however one may despise the practical working of their theory, the grandeur of its principles can not be despised.

They are in reality a proud race, great-hearted and high-spirited. They have had in their age their heroes and their martyrs; but they have had, on the other hand, their hypocrites, their adventurers, and their radicals—their greatest enemies.

Young Dardennes, to obtain grace for the equivocal origin of his convictions, placed himself in the front rank of these last.

Until he left college Louis de Camors never knew his uncle, who had remained on bad terms with his father; but he entertained for him, in secret, an enthusiastic

admiration, attributing to him all the virtues of that principle of which he seemed the exponent.

The Republic of '48 soon died: his uncle was among the vanquished; and this, to the young man, had but an additional attraction. Without his father's knowledge, he went to see him, as if on a pilgrimage to a holy shrine; and he was well received.

He found his uncle exasperated—not so much against his enemies as against his own party, to which he attributed all the disasters of the cause.

"They never can make revolutions with gloves on," he said in a solemn, dogmatic tone. "The men of 'ninety-three did not wear them. You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs.

"The pioneers of the future should march on, axe in hand!

"The chrysalis of the people is not hatched upon roses!

"Liberty is a goddess who demands great holocausts. Had they made a Reign of Terror in 'forty-eight, they would now be masters!"

These high-flown maxims astonished Louis de Camors. In his youthful simplicity he had an infinite respect for the men who had governed his country in her darkest hour; not more that they had given up power as poor as when they assumed it, than that they left it with their hands unstained with blood. To this praise—which will be accorded them in history, which redresses many contemporary injustices—he added a reproach which he could not reconcile with the strange regrets of his uncle. He reproached them with not

having more boldly separated the New Republic, in its management and minor details, from the memories of the old one. Far from agreeing with his uncle that a revival of the horrors of 'ninety-three would have assured the triumph of the New Republic, he believed it had sunk under the bloody shadow of its predecessor. He believed that, owing to this boasted Terror, France had been for centuries the only country in which the dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits.

It is useless to dwell longer on the relations of Louis de Camors with his uncle Dardennes. It is enough that he was doubtful and discouraged, and made the error of holding the cause responsible for the violence of its lesser apostles, and that he adopted the fatal error, too common in France at that period, of confounding progress with discord, liberty with license, and revolution with terrorism!

The natural result of irritation and disenchantment on this ardent spirit was to swing it rapidly around to the opposite pole of opinion. After all, Camors argued, his birth, his name, his family ties all pointed out his true course, which was to combat the cruel and despotic doctrines which he believed he detected under these democratic theories. Another thing in the habitual language of his uncle also shocked and repelled him—the profession of an absolute atheism. He had within him, in default of a formal creed, a fund of general belief and respect for holy things—that kind of religious sensibility which was shocked by impious cynicism. Further he could not comprehend then, or ever afterward, how principles alone, without faith in some higher

sanction, could sustain themselves by their own strength in the human conscience.

God—or no principles! This was the dilemma from which no German philosophy could rescue him.

This reaction in his mind drew him closer to those other branches of his family which he had hitherto neglected. His two aunts, living at Paris, had been compelled, in consequence of their small fortunes, to make some sacrifices to enter into the blessed state of matrimony. The elder, Eléanore-Jeanne, had married, during her father's life, the Comte de la Roche-Jugan—a man long past fifty, but still well worthy of being loved. Nevertheless, his wife did not love him. Their views on many essential points differed widely. M. de la Roche-Jugan was one of those who had served the Government of the Restoration with an unshaken but hopeless devotion. In his youth he had been attached to the person and to the ministry of the Duc de Richelieu; and he had preserved the memory of that illustrious man—of the elevated moderation of his sentiments—of the warmth of his patriotism and of his constancy. He saw the pitfalls ahead, pointed them out to his prince—displeased him by so doing, but still followed his fortunes. Once more retired to private life with but small means, he guarded his political principles rather like a religion than a hope. His hopes, his vivacity, his love of right—all these he turned toward God.

His piety, as enlightened as profound, ranked him among the choicest spirits who. then endeavored to reconcile the national faith of the past with the inexor-

able liberty of thought of the present. Like his co-laborers in this work, he experienced only a mortal sadness under which he sank. True, his wife contributed no little to hasten his end by the intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry.

She had little heart and great pride, and made her God subserve her passions, as Dardennes made liberty subserve his malice.

No sooner had she become a widow than she purified her salons. Thenceforth figured there only parishioners more orthodox than their bishops, French priests who denied Bossuet; consequently she believed that religion was saved in France. Louis de Camors, admitted to this choice circle by title both of relative and convert, found there the devotion of Louis XI and the charity of Catherine de Medicis; and he there lost very soon the little faith that remained to him.

He asked himself sadly whether there was no middle ground between Terror and Inquisition; whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing. He sought a middle course, possessing the force and cohesion of a party; but he sought in vain. It seemed to him that the whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes; and that what was not extreme was inert and indifferent—dragging out, day by day, an existence without faith and without principle.

Thus at least appeared to him those whom the sad changes of his life showed him as types of modern politics.

His younger aunt, Louise-Elizabeth, who enjoyed to the full all the pleasures of modern life, had already

profited by her father's death to make a rich misalliance. She married the Baron Tonnelier, whose father, although the son of a miller, had shown ability and honesty enough to fill high positions under the First Empire.

The Baron Tonnelier had a large fortune, increasing every day by successful speculation. In his youth he had been a good horseman, a Voltairian, and a Liberal.

In time—though he remained a Voltairian—he renounced horsemanship, and Liberalism. Although he was a simple deputy, he had a twinge of democracy now and then; but after he was invested with the peerage, he felt sure from that moment that the human species had no more progress to make.

The French Revolution was ended; its giddiest height attained. No longer could any one walk, talk, write, or rise. That perplexed him. Had he been sincere, he would have avowed that he could not comprehend that there could be storms, or thunder-clouds in the heavens—that the world was not perfectly happy and tranquil, while he himself was so. When his nephew was old enough to comprehend him, Baron Tonnelier was no longer peer of France; but being one who does himself no hurt—and sometimes much good—by a fall, he filled a high office under the new government. He endeavored to discharge its duties conscientiously, as he had those of the preceding reign.

He spoke with peculiar ease of suppressing this or that journal—such an orator, such a book; of suppressing everything, in short, except himself. In his view, France had been in the wrong road since 1789, and he sought to lead her back from that fatal date.

Nevertheless, he never spoke of returning, in his proper person, to his grandfather's mill; which, to say the least, was inconsistent. Had Liberty been mother to this old gentleman, and had he met her in a clump of woods, he would have strangled her. We regret to add that he had the habit of terming "old duffers" such ministers as he suspected of liberal views, and especially such as were in favor of popular education. A more hurtful counsellor never approached a throne; but luckily, while near it in office, he was far from it in influence.

He was still a charming man, gallant and fresh—more gallant, however, than fresh. Consequently his habits were not too good, and he haunted the green-room of the opera. He had two daughters, recently married, before whom he repeated the most piquant witticisms of Voltaire, and the most improper stories of Tallemant de Réaux; and consequently both promised to afford the scandalmongers a series of racy anecdotes, as their mother had before them.

While Louis de Camors was learning rapidly, by the association and example of the collateral branches of his family, to defy equally all principles and all convictions, his terrible father finished the task.

Worldling to the last extreme, depraved to his very core; past-master in the art of Parisian high life; an unbridled egotist, thinking himself superior to everything because he abased everything to himself; and, finally, flattering himself for despising all duties, which he had all his life prided himself on dispensing with—such was his father. But for all this, he was the pride

of his circle, with a pleasing presence and an indefinable charm of manner.

The father and son saw little of each other. M. de Camors was too proud to entangle his son in his own debaucheries; but the course of every-day life sometimes brought them together at meal-time. He would then listen with cool mockery to the enthusiastic or despondent speeches of the youth. He never deigned to argue seriously, but responded in a few bitter words, that fell like drops of sleet on the few sparks still glowing in the son's heart.

Becoming gradually discouraged, the latter lost all taste for work, and gave himself up, more and more, to the idle pleasures of his position. Abandoning himself wholly to these, he threw into them all the seductions of his person, all the generosity of his character—but at the same time a sadness always gloomy, sometimes desperate.

The bitter malice he displayed, however, did not prevent his being loved by women and renowned among men. And the latter imitated him.

He aided materially in founding a charming school of youth without smiles. His air of *ennui* and lassitude, which with him at least had the excuse of a serious foundation, was servilely copied by the youth around him, who never knew any greater distress than an overloaded stomach, but whom it pleased, nevertheless, to appear faded in their flower and contemptuous of human nature.

We have seen Camors in this phase of his existence. But in reality nothing was more foreign to him than

the mask of careless disdain that the young man assumed. Upon falling into the common ditch, he, perhaps, had one advantage over his fellows: he did not make his bed with base resignation; he tried persistently to raise himself from it by a violent struggle, only to be hurled upon it once more.

Strong souls do not sleep easily: indifference weighs them down.

They demand a mission—a motive for action—and faith.

Louis de Camors was yet to find his.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW ACTRESS IN A NOVEL RÔLE

LOUIS DE CAMORS'S father had not told him all in that last letter.

Instead of leaving him a fortune, he left him only embarrassments, for he was three fourths ruined. The disorder of his affairs had begun a long time before, and it was to repair them that he had married; a process that had not proved successful. A large inheritance on which he had relied as coming to his wife went elsewhere—to endow a charity hospital. The Comte de Camors began a suit to recover it before the tribunal of the Council of State, but compromised it for an annuity of thirty thousand francs. This stopped at his death. He enjoyed, besides, several fat sinecures, which his name, his social rank, and his personal address secured him from some of the great insurance companies. But these resources did not survive him; he only rented the house he had occupied; and the young Comte de Camors found himself suddenly reduced to the provision of his mother's dowry—a bare pittance to a man of his habits and rank.

His father had often assured him he could leave him nothing, so the son was accustomed to look forward to

this situation. Therefore, when he realized it, he was neither surprised nor revolted by the improvident egotism of which he was the victim. His reverence for his father continued unabated, and he did not read with the less respect or confidence the singular missive which figures at the beginning of this story. The moral theories which this letter advanced were not new to him. They were a part of the very atmosphere around him; he had often revolved them in his feverish brain; yet, never before had they appeared to him in the condensed form of a dogma, with the clear precision of a practical code; nor as now, with the authorization of such a voice and of such an example.

One incident gave powerful aid in confirming the impression of these last pages on his mind. Eight days after his father's death, he was reclining on the lounge in his smoking-room, his face dark as night and as his thoughts, when a servant entered and handed him a card. He took it listlessly, and read—"Lescande, architect." Two red spots rose to his pale cheeks—"I do not see any one," he said.

"So I told this gentleman," replied the servant, "but he insists in such an extraordinary manner——"

"In an extraordinary manner?"

"Yes, sir; as if he had something very serious to communicate."

"Something serious—aha! Then let him in." Camors rose and paced the chamber, a smile of bitter mockery wreathing his lips. "And must I now kill him?" he muttered between his teeth.

Lescande entered, and his first act dissipated the

apprehension his conduct had caused. He rushed to the young Count and seized him by both hands, while Camors remarked that his face was troubled and his lips trembled. "Sit down and be calm," he said.

"My friend," said the other, after a pause, "I come late to see you, for which I crave pardon; but—I am myself so miserable! See, I am in mourning!"

Camors felt a chill run to his very marrow. "In mourning!—and why?" he asked, mechanically.

"Juliette is dead!" sobbed Lescande, and covered his eyes with his great hands.

"Great God!" cried Camors in a hollow voice. He listened a moment to Lescande's bitter sobs, then made a movement to take his hand, but dared not do it. "Great God! is it possible?" he repeated.

"It was so sudden!" sobbed Lescande, brokenly. "It seems like a dream—a frightful dream! You know the last time you visited us she was not well. You remember I told you she had wept all day. Poor child! The morning of my return she was seized with congestion—of the lungs—of the brain—I don't know!—but she is dead! And so good!—so gentle, so loving!—to the last moment! Oh, my friend! my friend! A few moments before she died, she called me to her side. 'Oh, I love you so! I love you so!' she said. 'I never loved any but you—you only! Pardon me!—oh, pardon me!' Pardon her, poor child! My God, for what? for dying?—for she never gave me a moment's grief before in this world. Oh, God of mercy!"

"I beseech you, my friend——"

"Yes, yes, I do wrong. You also have your griefs.

But we are all selfish, you know. However, it was not of that that I came to speak. Tell me—I know not whether a report I hear is correct. Pardon me if I mistake, for you know I never would dream of offending you; but they say that you have been left in very bad circumstances. If this is indeed so, my friend——"

"It is not," interrupted Camors, abruptly.

"Well, if it were—I do not intend keeping my little house. Why should I, now? My little son can wait while I work for him. Then, after selling my house, I shall have two hundred thousand francs. Half of this is yours—return it when you can!"

"I thank you, my unselfish friend," replied Camors, much moved, "but I need nothing. My affairs are disordered, it is true; but I shall still remain richer than you."

"Yes, but with your tastes——"

"Well?"

"At all events, you know where to find me. I may count upon you—may I not?"

"You may."

"Adieu, my friend! I can do you no good now; but I shall see you again—shall I not?"

"Yes—another time."

Lescande departed, and the young Count remained immovable, with his features convulsed and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

This moment decided his whole future.

Sometimes a man feels a sudden, unaccountable impulse to smother in himself all human love and sympathy.

In the presence of this unhappy man, so unworthily treated, so broken-spirited, so confiding, Camors—if there be any truth in old spiritual laws—should have seen himself guilty of an atrocious act, which should have condemned him to a remorse almost unbearable.

But if it were true that the human herd was but the product of material forces in nature, producing, haphazard, strong beings and weak ones—lambs and lions—he had played only the lion's part in destroying his companion. He said to himself, with his father's letter beneath his eyes, that this was the fact; and the reflection calmed him.

The more he thought, that day and the next, in depth of the retreat in which he had buried himself, the more was he persuaded that this doctrine was that very truth which he had sought, and which his father had bequeathed to him as the whole rule of his life. His cold and barren heart opened with a voluptuous pleasure under this new flame that filled and warmed it.

From this moment he possessed a faith—a principle of action—a plan of life—all that he needed; and was no longer oppressed by doubts, agitation, and remorse. This doctrine, if not the most elevated, was at least above the level of the most of mankind. It satisfied his pride and justified his scorn.

To preserve his self-esteem, it was only necessary for him to preserve his honor, to do nothing low, as his father had said; and he determined never to do anything which, in his eyes, partook of that character. Moreover, were there not men he himself had met thor-

oughly steeped in materialism, who were yet regarded as the most honorable men of their day?

Perhaps he might have asked himself whether this incontestable fact might not, in part, have been attributed rather to the individual than to the doctrine; and whether men's beliefs did not always influence their actions. However that might have been, from the date of this crisis Louis de Camors made his father's will the rule of his life.

To develop in all their strength the physical and intellectual gifts which he possessed; to make of himself the polished type of the civilization of the times; to charm women and control men; to revel in all the joys of intellect, of the senses, and of rank; to subdue as servile instincts all natural sentiments; to scorn, as chimeras and hypocrisies, all vulgar beliefs; to love nothing, fear nothing, respect nothing, save honor—such, in fine, were the duties which he recognized, and the rights which he arrogated to himself.

It was with these redoubtable weapons, and strengthened by a keen intelligence and vigorous will, that he would return to the world—his brow calm and grave, his eye caressing while unyielding, a smile upon his lips, as men had known him.

From this moment there was no cloud either upon his mind or upon his face, which wore the aspect of perpetual youth. He determined, above all, not to retrench, but to preserve, despite the narrowness of his present fortune, those habits of elegant luxury in which he still might indulge for several years, by the expenditure of his principal.

Both pride and policy gave him this council in an equal degree. He was not ignorant that the world is as cold toward the needy as it is warm to those not needing its countenance. Had he been thus ignorant, the attitude of his family, just after the death of his father, would have opened his eyes to the fact.

His aunt de la Roche-Jugan and his uncle Tonnelier manifested toward him the cold circumspection of people who suspected they were dealing with a ruined man. They had even, for greater security, left Paris, and neglected to notify the young Count in what retreat they had chosen to hide their grief. Nevertheless he was soon to learn it, for while he was busied in settling his father's affairs and organizing his own projects of fortune and ambition, one fine morning in August he met with a lively surprise.

He counted among his relatives one of the richest landed proprietors of France, General the Marquis de Campvallon d'Armignes, celebrated for his fearful outbursts in the Corps Législatif. He had a voice of thunder, and when he rolled out, "Bah! Enough! Stop this order of the day!" the senate trembled, and the government commissioners bounced on their chairs. Yet he was the best fellow in the world, although he had killed two fellow-creatures in duels—but then he had his reasons for that.

Camors knew him but slightly, paid him the necessary respect that politeness demanded toward a relative; met him sometimes at the club, over a game of whist, and that was all.

Two years before, the General had lost a nephew,

the direct heir to his name and fortune. Consequently he was hunted by an eager pack of cousins and relatives; and Madame de la Roche-Jugan and the Baroness Tonnelier gave tongue in their foremost rank.

Camors was indifferent, and had, since that event, been particularly reserved in his intercourse with the General. Therefore he was considerably astonished when he received the following letter:—

"DEAR KINSMAN:

"Your two aunts and their families are with me in the country. When it is agreeable to you to join them, I shall always feel happy to give a cordial greeting to the son of an old friend and companion-in-arms.

"I presented myself at your house before leaving Paris, but you were not visible.

"Believe me, I comprehend your grief: that you have experienced an irreparable loss, in which I sympathize with you most sincerely.

"Receive, my dear kinsman, the best wishes of

GENERAL, THE

MARQUIS DE CAMPVALLON D'ARMIGNES.

"CHÂTEAU DE CAMPVALLON, Voie de l'ouest.

"P.S.—It is probable, my young cousin, that I may have something of interest to communicate to you!"

This last sentence, and the exclamation mark that followed it, failed not to shake slightly the impassive calm that Camors was at that moment cultivating. He could not help seeing, as in a mirror, under the veil of the mysterious postscript, the reflection of seven hundred thousand francs of ground-rent which made the splendid income of the General. He recalled that his father, who had served some time in Africa, had been

attached to the staff of M. de Campvallon as aide-de-camp, and that he had besides rendered him a great service ofa different nature.

Notwithstanding that he felt the absurdity of these dreams, and wished to keep his heart free from them, he left the next day for Campvallon. After enjoying for seven or eight hours all the comforts and luxuries the Western line is reputed to afford its guests, Camors arrived in the evening at the station, where the General's carriage awaited him. The seignorial pile of the Château Campvallon soon appeared to him on a height, of which the sides were covered with magnificent woods, sloping down nearly to the plain, there spreading out widely.

It was almost the dinner-hour; and the young man, after arranging his toilet, immediately descended to the drawing-room, where his presence seemed to throw a wet blanket over the assembled circle. To make up for this, the General gave him the warmest welcome; only —as he had a short memory or little imagination—he found nothing better to say than to repeat the expressions of his letter, while squeezing his hand almost to the point of fracture.

"The son of my old friend and companion-in-arms," he cried; and the words rang out in such a sonorous voice they seemed to impress even himself—for it was noticeable that after a remark, the General always seemed astonished, as if startled by the words that came out of his mouth—and that seemed suddenly to expand the compass of his ideas and the depth of his sentiments.

To complete his portrait: he was of medium size, square, and stout; panting when he ascended stairs, or even walking on level ground; a face massive and broad as a mask, and reminding one of those fabled beings who blew fire from their nostrils; a huge moustache, white and grizzly; small gray eyes, always fixed, like those of a doll, but still terrible. He marched toward a man slowly, imposingly, with eyes fixed, as if beginning a duel to the death, and demanded of him imperatively—the time of day!

Camors well knew this innocent weakness of his host, but, notwithstanding, was its dupe for one instant during the evening.

They had left the dining-table, and he was standing carelessly in the alcove of a window, holding a cup of coffee, when the General approached him from the extreme end of the room with a severe yet confidential expression, which seemed to preface an announcement of the greatest importance.

The postscript rose before him. He felt he was to have an immediate explanation.

The General approached, seized him by the buttonhole, and withdrawing him from the depth of the recess, looked into his eyes as if he wished to penetrate his very soul. Suddenly he spoke, in his thunderous voice. He said:

"What do you take in the morning, young man?"

"Tea, General."

"Aha! Then give your orders to Pierre—just as if you were at home;" and, turning on his heel and join-

ing the ladies, he left Camors to digest his little comedy as he might.

Eight days passed. Twice the General made his guest the object of his formidable advance. The first time, having put him out of countenance, he contented himself with exclaiming:

"Well, young man!" and turned on his heel.

The next time he bore down upon Camors, he said not a word, and retired in silence.

Evidently the General had not the slightest recollection of the postscript. Camors tried to be contented, but would continually ask himself why he had come to Campvallon, in the midst of his family, of whom he was not overfond, and in the depths of the country, which he execrated. Luckily, the castle boasted a library well stocked with works on civil and international law, jurisprudence, and political economy. He took advantage of it; and, resuming the thread of those serious studies which had been broken off during his period of hopelessness, plunged into those recondite themes that pleased his active intelligence and his awakened ambition. Thus he waited patiently until politeness would permit him to bring to an explanation the former friend and companion-in-arms of his father. In the morning he rode on horseback; gave a lesson in fencing to his cousin Sigismund, the son of Madame de la Roche-Jugan; then shut himself up in the library until the evening, which he passed at bezique with the General. Meantime he viewed with the eye of a philosopher the strife of the covetous relatives who hovered around their rich prey.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan had invented an original way of making herself agreeable to the General, which was to persuade him he had disease of the heart. She continually felt his pulse with her plump hand, sometimes reassuring him, and at others inspiring him with a salutary terror, although he denied it.

"Good heavens! my dear cousin!" he would exclaim, "let me alone. I know I am mortal like everybody else. What of that? But I see your aim—it is to convert me! Ta—ta!"

She not only wished to convert him, but to marry him, and bury him besides.

She based her hopes in this respect chiefly on her son Sigismund; knowing that the General bitterly regretted having no one to inherit his name. He had but to marry Madame de la Roche-Jugan and adopt her son to banish this care. Without a single allusion to this fact, the Countess failed not to turn the thoughts of the General toward it with all the tact of an accomplished *intrigante*, with all the ardor of a mother, and with all the piety of an unctuous devotee.

Her sister, the Baroness Tonnelier, bitterly confessed her own disadvantage. She was not a widow. And she had no son. But she had two daughters, both of them graceful, very elegant and sparkling. One was Madame Bacquière, the wife of a broker; the other, Madame Van-Cuyp, wife of a young Hollander, doing business at Paris.

Both interpreted life and marriage gayly; both floated from one year into another dancing, riding, hunting, coquetting, and singing recklessly the most *risque* songs

of the minor theatres. Formerly, Camors, in his pensive mood, had taken an aversion to these little examples of modern feminine frivolity. Since he had changed his views of life he did them more justice. He said, calmly:

"They are pretty little animals that follow their instincts."

Mesdames Bacquière and Van-Cuyp, instigated by their mother, applied themselves assiduously to making the General feel all the sacred joys that cluster round the domestic hearth. They enlivened his household, exercised his horses, killed his game, and tortured his piano. They seemed to think that the General, once accustomed to their sweetness and animation, could not do without it, and that their society would become indispensable to him. They mingled, too, with their adroit manœuvres, familiar and delicate attentions, likely to touch an old man. They sat on his knees like children, played gently with his moustache, and arranged in the latest style the military knot of his cravat.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan never ceased to deplore confidentially to the General the unfortunate education of her nieces; while the Baroness, on her side, lost no opportunity of holding up in bold relief the emptiness, impertinence, and sulkiness of young Count Sigismund.

In the midst of these honorable conflicts one person, who took no part in them, attracted the greatest share of Camors's interest; first for her beauty and afterward for her qualities. This was an orphan of excellent family, but very poor, of whom Madame de la Roche-Jugan

and Madame Tonnelier had taken joint charge. Mademoiselle Charlotte de Luc d'Estrelles passed six months of each year with the Countess and six with the Baroness. She was twenty-five years of age, tall and blonde, with deep-set eyes under the shadow of sweeping, black lashes. Thick masses of hair framed her sad but splendid brow; and she was badly, or rather poorly dressed, never condescending to wear the cast-off clothes of her relatives, but preferring gowns of simplest material made by her own hands. These draperies gave her the appearance of an antique statue.

Her Tonnelier cousins nicknamed her "the goddess." They hated her; she despised them. The name they gave her, however, was marvellously suitable.

When she walked, you would have imagined she had descended from a pedestal; the pose of her head was like that of the Greek Venus; her delicate, dilating nostrils seemed carved by a cunning chisel from transparent ivory. She had a startled, wild air, such as one sees in pictures of huntress nymphs. She used a naturally fine voice with great effect; and had already cultivated, so far as she could, a taste for art.

She was naturally so taciturn one was compelled to guess her thoughts; and long since Camors had reflected as to what was passing in that self-centred soul. Inspired by his innate generosity, as well as his secret admiration, he took pleasure in heaping upon this poor cousin the attentions he might have paid a queen; but she always seemed as indifferent to them as she was to the opposite course of her involuntary benefactress. Her position at Campvallon was very odd. After

Camors's arrival, she was more taciturn than ever; absorbed, estranged, as if meditating some deep design, she would suddenly raise the long lashes of her blue eyes, dart a rapid glance here and there, and finally fix it on Camors, who would feel himself tremble under it.

One afternoon, when he was seated in the library, he heard a gentle tap at the door, and Mademoiselle entered, looking very pale. Somewhat astonished, he rose and saluted her.

"I wish to speak with you, cousin," she said. The accent was pure and grave, but slightly touched with evident emotion. Camors stared at her, showed her to a divan, and took a chair facing her.

"You know very little of me, cousin," she continued, "but I am frank and courageous. I will come at once to the object that brings me here. Is it true that you are ruined?"

"Why do you ask, Mademoiselle?"

"You always have been very good to me—you only. I am very grateful to you; and I also—" She stopped, dropped her eyes, and a bright flush suffused her cheeks. Then she bent her head, smiling like one who has regained courage under difficulty. "Well, then," she resumed, "I am ready to devote my life to you. You will deem me very romantic, but I have wrought out of our united poverty a very charming picture, I believe. I am sure I should make an excellent wife for the husband I loved. If you must leave France, as they tell me you must, I will follow you—I will be your brave and faithful helpmate. Pardon me, one word more, Mon-

sieur de Camors. My proposition would be immodest if it concealed any afterthought. It conceals none. I am poor. I have but fifteen hundred francs' income. If you are richer than I, consider I have said nothing; for nothing in the world would then induce me to marry you!"

She paused; and with a manner of mingled yearning, candor, and anguish, fixed on him her large eyes full of fire.

There was a solemn pause. Between these strange natures, both high and noble, a terrible destiny seemed pending at this moment, and both felt it.

At length Camors responded in a grave, calm voice: "It is impossible, Mademoiselle, that you can appreciate the trial to which you expose me; but I have searched my heart, and I there find nothing worthy of you. Do me the justice to believe that my decision is based neither upon your fortune nor upon my own: but I am resolved never to marry." She sighed deeply, and rose. "Adieu, cousin," she said.

"I beg—I pray you to remain one moment," cried the young man, reseating her with gentle force upon the sofa. He walked half across the room to repress his agitation; then leaning on a table near the young girl, said:

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, you are unhappy; are you not?"

"A little, perhaps," she answered.

"I do not mean at this moment, but always?"

"Always!"

"Aunt de la Roche-Jugan treats you harshly?"

"Undoubtedly; she dreads that I may entrap her son. Good heavens!"

"The little Tonneliers are jealous of you, and Uncle Tonnelier torments you?"

"Basely!" she said; and two tears swam on her eyelashes, then glistened like diamonds on her cheek.

"And what do you believe of the religion of our aunt?"

"What would you have me believe of religion that bestows no virtue—restrains no vice?"

"Then you are a non-believer?"

"One may believe in God and the Gospel without believing in the religion of our aunt."

"But she will drive you into a convent. Why, then, do you not enter one?"

"I love life," the girl said.

He looked at her silently a moment, then continued: "Yes, you love life—the sunlight, the thoughts, the arts, the luxuries—everything that is beautiful, like yourself. Then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, all these are in your hands; why do you not grasp them?"

"How?" she queried, surprised and somewhat startled.

"If you have, as I believe you have, as much strength of soul as intelligence and beauty, you can escape at once and forever the miserable servitude fate has imposed upon you. Richly endowed as you are, you might become to-morrow a great *artiste*, independent, fêted, rich, adored—the mistress of Paris and of the world!"

"And yours also?—No!" said this strange girl.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle Charlotte. I did not suspect you of any improper idea, when you offered to share my uncertain fortunes. Render me, I pray you, the same justice at this moment. My moral principles are very lax, it is true, but I am as proud as yourself. I never shall reach my aim by any subterfuge. No; strive to study art. I find you beautiful and seductive, but I am governed by sentiments superior to personal interests. I was profoundly touched by your sympathetic leaning toward me, and have sought to testify my gratitude by friendly counsel. Since, however, you now suspect me of striving to corrupt you for my own ends, I am silent, Mademoiselle, and permit you to depart."

"Pray proceed, Monsieur de Camors."

"You will then listen to me with confidence?"

"I will do so."

"Well, then, Mademoiselle, you have seen little of the world, but you have seen enough to judge and to be certain of the value of its esteem. The world! That is your family and mine: Monsieur and Madame Tonnelier, Monsieur and Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and the little Sigismund!

"Well, then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, the day that you become a great *artiste*, rich, triumphant, idolized, wealthy—drinking, in deep draughts, all the joys of life—that day Uncle Tonnelier will invoke outraged morals, our aunt will swoon with prudery in the arms of her old lovers, and Madame de la Roche-Jugan will groan and turn her yellow eyes to heaven! But what will all that matter to you?"

"Then, Monsieur, you advise me to lead an immoral life."

"By no manner of means. I only urge you, in defiance of public opinion, to become an actress, as the only sure road to independence, fame, and fortune. And besides, there is no law preventing an actress marrying and being 'honorable,' as the world understands the word. You have heard of more than one example of this."

"Without mother, family, or protector, it would be an extraordinary thing for me to do! I can not fail to see that sooner or later I should be a lost girl."

Camors remained silent. "Why do you not answer?" she asked.

"Heavens! Mademoiselle, because this is so delicate a subject, and our ideas are so different about it. I can not change mine; I must leave you yours. As for me, I am a very pagan."

"How? Are good and bad indifferent to you?"

"No; but to me it seems bad to fear the opinion of people one despises, to practise what one does not believe, and to yield before prejudices and phantoms of which one knows the unreality. It is bad to be a slave or a hypocrite, as are three fourths of the world. Evil is ugliness, ignorance, folly, and baseness. Good is beauty, talent, ability, and courage! That is all."

"And God?" the girl cried. He did not reply. She looked fixedly at him a moment without catching the eyes he kept turned from her. Her head drooped heavily; then raising it suddenly, she said: "There are sentiments men can not understand. In my bitter

hours I have often dreamed of this free life you now advise; but I have always recoiled before one thought —only one."

"And that?"

"Perhaps the sentiment is not peculiar to me—perhaps it is excessive pride, but I have a great regard for myself—my person is sacred to me. Should I come to believe in nothing, like you—and I am far from that yet, thank God!—I should even then remain honest and true—faithful to one love, simply from pride. I should prefer," she added, in a voice deep and sustained, but somewhat strained, "I should prefer to desecrate an altar rather than myself!"

Saying these words, she rose, made a haughty movement of the head in sign of an adieu, and left the room.

CHAPTER V

THE COUNT LOSES A LADY AND FINDS A MISSION

AMORS sat for some time plunged in thought.

He was astonished at the depths he had discovered in her character; he was displeased with himself without well knowing why; and, above all, he was much struck by his cousin.

However, as he had but a slight opinion of the sincerity of women, he persuaded himself that Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, when she came to offer him her heart and hand, nevertheless knew he was not altogether a despicable match for her. He said to himself that a few years back he might have been duped by her apparent sincerity, and congratulated himself on not having fallen into this attractive snare—on not having listened to the first promptings of credulity and sincere emotion.

He might have spared himself these compliments. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, as he was soon to discover, had been in that perfectly frank, generous, and disinterested state of mind in which women sometimes are.

Only, would it happen to him to find her so in the future? That was doubtful, thanks to M. de Camors. It often happens that by despising men too much, we

degrade them; in suspecting women too much, we lose them.

About an hour passed; there was another rap at the library door. Camors felt a slight palpitation and a secret wish that it should prove Mademoiselle Charlotte.

It was the General who entered. He advanced with measured stride, puffed like some sea-monster, and seized Camors by the lapel of his coat. Then he said, impressively:

"Well, young gentleman!"

"Well, General."

"What are you doing in here?"

"Oh, I am at work."

"At work? Um! Sit down there—sit down, sit down!" He threw himself on the sofa where Mademoiselle had been, which rather changed the perspective for Camors.

"Well, well!" he repeated, after a long pause.

"But what then, General?"

"What then? The deuce! Why, have you not noticed that I have been for some days extraordinarily agitated?"

"No, General, I have not noticed it."

"You are not very observing! I am extraordinarily agitated—enough to fatigue the eyes. So agitated, upon my word of honor, that there are moments when I am tempted to believe your aunt is right: that I *have* disease of the heart!"

"Bah, General! My aunt is dreaming; you have the pulse of an infant."

"You believe so, really? I do not fear death; but it is always annoying to think of it. But I am too much agitated—it is necessary to put a stop to it. You understand?"

"Perfectly; but how can it concern me?"

"Concern you? You are about to hear. You are my cousin, are you not?"

"Truly, General, I have that honor."

"But very distant, eh? I have thirty-six cousins as near as you, and—the devil! To speak plainly, I owe you nothing."

"And I have never demanded payment even of that, General."

"Ah, I know that! Well, you are my cousin, very far removed! But you are more than that. Your father saved my life in the Atlas. He has related it all to you —No? Well, that does not astonish me; for he was no braggart, that father of yours; he was a man! Had he not quitted the army, a brilliant career was before him. People talk a great deal of Pélissier, of Canrobert, of MacMahon, and of others. I say nothing against them; they are good men doubtless—at least I hear so; but your father would have eclipsed them all had he taken the trouble. But he didn't take the trouble!

"Well, for the story: We were crossing a gorge of the Atlas; we were in retreat; I had lost my command; I was following as a volunteer. It is useless to weary you with details; we were in retreat; a shower of stones and bullets poured upon us, as if from the moon. Our column was slightly disordered; I was in the rear-guard—whack! my horse was down, and I under him!

We were in a narrow gorge with sloping sides some fifteen feet high; five dirty guerillas slid down the sides and fell upon me and on the beast—forty devils! I can see them now! Just here the gorge took a sudden turn, so no one could see my trouble; or no one wished to see it, which comes to the same thing.

"I have told you things were in much disorder; and I beg you to remember that with a dead horse and five live Arabs on top of me, I was not very comfortable. I was suffocating; in fact, I was devilish far from comfortable.

"Just then your father ran to my assistance, like the noble fellow he was! He drew me from under my horse; he fell upon the Arabs. When I was up, I aided him a little—but that is nothing to the point—I never shall forget him!"

There was a pause, when the General added:

"Let us understand each other, and speak plainly. Would it be very repugnant to your feelings to have seven hundred thousand francs a year, and to be called, after me, Marquis de Campvallon d'Armignes? Come, speak up, and give me an answer."

The young Count reddened slightly.

"My name is Camors," he said, gently.

"What! You would not wish me to adopt you? You refuse to become the heir of my name and of my fortune?"

"Yes, General."

"Do you not wish time to reflect upon it?"

"No, General. I am sincerely grateful for your goodness; your generous intentions toward me touch

me deeply, but in a question of honor I never reflect or hesitate."

The General puffed fiercely, like a locomotive blowing off steam. Then he rose and took two or three turns up and down the gallery, shuffling his feet, his chest heaving. Then he returned and reseated himself.

"What are your plans for the future?" he asked, abruptly.

"I shall try, in the first place, General, to repair my fortune, which is much shattered. I am not so great a stranger to business as people suppose, and my father's connections and my own will give me a footing in some great financial or industrial enterprise. Once there, I shall succeed by force of will and steady work. Besides, I shall fit myself for public life, and aspire, when circumstances permit me, to become a deputy."

"Well, well, a man must do something. Idleness is the parent of all vices. See; like yourself, I am fond of the horse— a noble animal. I approve of racing; it improves the breed of horses, and aids in mounting our cavalry efficiently. But sport should be an amusement, not a profession. Hem! so you aspire to become a deputy?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I can help you in that, at least. When you are ready I will send in my resignation, and recommend to my brave and faithful constituents that you take my place. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably, General; and I am truly grateful. But why should you resign?"

"Why? Well, to be useful to you in the first place;

in the second, I am sick of it. I shall not be sorry to give personally a little lesson to the government, which I trust will profit by it. You know me—I am no Jacobin; at first I thought that would succeed. But when I see what is going on!"

"What is going on, General?"

"When I see a Tonnelier a great dignitary! It makes me long for the pen of Tacitus, on my word. When I was retired in 'forty-eight, under a mean and cruel injustice they did me, I had not reached the age of exemption. I was still capable of good and loyal service; but probably I could have waited until an amendment. I found it at least in the confidence of my brave and faithful constituents. But, my young friend, one tires of everything. The Assemblies at the Luxembourg—I mean the Palace of the Bourbons—fatigue me. In short, whatever regret I may feel at parting from my honorable colleagues, and from my faithful constituents, I shall abdicate my functions whenever you are ready and willing to accept them. Have you not some property in this district?"

"Yes, General, a little property which belonged to my mother; a small manor, with a little land round it, called Reuilly."

"Reuilly! Not two steps from Des Rameures! Certainly—certainly! Well, that is one foot in the stirrup."

"But then there is one difficulty; I am obliged to sell it."

"The devil! And why?"

"It is all that is left to me, and it only brings me

eleven thousand francs a year; and to embark in business I need capital—a beginning. I prefer not to borrow."

The General rose, and once more his military tramp shook the gallery. Then he threw himself back on the sofa.

"You must not sell that property! I owe you nothing, 'tis true, but I have an affection for you. You refuse to be my adopted son. Well, I regret this, and must have recourse to other projects to aid you. I warn you I shall try other projects. You must not sell your lands if you wish to become a deputy, for the country people—especially those of Des Rameures—will not hear of it. Meantime you will need funds. Permit me to offer you three hundred thousand francs. You may return them when you can, without interest, and if you never return them you will confer a very great favor upon me."

"But in truth, General——"

"Come, come! Accept it as from a relative—from a friend—from your father's friend—on any ground you please, so you accept. If not, you will wound me seriously."

Camors rose, took the General's hand, and pressing it with emotion, said, briefly——

"I accept, sir. I thank you!"

The General sprang up at these words like a furious lion, his moustache bristling, his nostrils dilating, his chest heaving. Staring at the young Count with real ferocity, he suddenly drew him to his breast and embraced him with great fervor. Then he strode to the

door with his usual solemnity, and quickly brushing a tear from his cheek, left the room.

The General was a good man; but, like many good people, he had not been happy. You might smile at his oddities: you never could reproach him with vices.

He was a small man, but he had a great soul. Timid at heart, especially with women, he was delicate, passionate, and chaste. He had loved but little, and never had been loved at all. He declared that he had retired from all friendship with women, because of a wrong that he had suffered. At forty years of age he had married the daughter of a poor colonel who had been killed by the enemy. Not long after, his wife had deceived him with one of his aides-de-camp.

The treachery was revealed to him by a rival, who played on this occasion the infamous *rôle* of Iago. Campvallon laid aside his starred epaulettes, and in two successive duels, still remembered in Africa, killed on two successive days the guilty one and his betrayer. His wife died shortly after, and he was left more lonely than ever. He was not the man to console himself with venal love; a gross remark made him blush; the *corps de ballet* inspired him with terror. He did not dare to avow it, but the dream of his old age, with his fierce moustache and his grim countenance, was the devoted love of some young girl, at whose feet he might pour out, without shame, without distrust even, all the tenderness of his simple and heroic heart.

On the evening of the day which had been marked for Camors by these two interesting episodes, Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles did not come down to din-

ner, but sent word she had a headache. This message was received with a general murmur, and with some sharp remarks from Madame de la Roche-Jugan, which implied Mademoiselle was not in a position which justified her in having a headache. The dinner, however, was not less gay than usual, thanks to Mesdames Bacquière and Van-Cuyp, and to their husbands, who had arrived from Paris to pass Sunday with them.

To celebrate this happy meeting, they drank very freely of champagne, talked slang, and imitated actors, causing much amusement to the servants. Returning to the drawing-room, these innocent young things thought it very funny to take their husbands' hats, put their feet in them, and, thus shod, to run a steeplechase across the room. Meantime Madame de la Roche-Jagan felt the General's pulse frequently, and found it variable.

Next morning at breakfast all the General's guests assembled, except Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, whose headache apparently was no better. They remarked also the absence of the General, who was the embodiment of politeness and punctuality. A sense of uneasiness was beginning to creep over all, when suddenly the door opened and the General appeared leading Mademoiselle d'Estrelles by the hand.

The young girl's eyes were red; her face was very pale. The General's face was scarlet. He advanced a few steps, like an actor about to address his audience; cast fierce glances on all sides of him, and cleared his throat with a sound that echoed like the bass notes of a grand piano. Then he spoke in a voice of thunder:

"My dear guests and friends, permit me to present to you the Marquise de Campvallon d'Armignes!"

An iceberg at the North Pole is not colder than was the General's salon at this announcement.

He held the young lady by the hand, and retaining his position in the centre of the room, launched out fierce glances. Then his eyes began to wander and roll convulsively in their sockets, as if he was himself astonished at the effect his announcement had produced.

Camors was the first to come to the rescue, and taking his hand, said: "Accept, my dear General, my congratulations. I am extremely happy, and rejoice at your good fortune; the more so, as I feel the lady is so well worthy of you." Then, bowing to Mademoiselle d'Estrelles with a grave grace, he pressed her hand, and turning away, was struck dumb at seeing Madame de la Roche-Jugan in the arms of the General. She passed from his into those of Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, who feared at first, from the violence of the caresses, that there was a secret design to strangle her.

"General," said Madame de la Roche-Jugan in a plaintive voice, "you remember I always recommended her to you. I always spoke well of her. She is my daughter—my second child. Sigismund, embrace your sister! You permit it, General? Ah, we never know how much we love these children until we lose them! I always spoke well of her; did—I not—Ge—General?" And here Madame de la Roche-Jugan burst into tears.

The General, who began to entertain a high opinion of the Countess's heart, declared that Mademoiselle

d'Estrelles would find in him a friend and father. After which flattering assurance, Madame de la Roche-Jugan seated herself in a solitary corner, behind a curtain, whence they heard sobs and moans issue for a whole hour. She could not even breakfast; happiness had taken away her appetite.

The ice once broken, all tried to make themselves agreeable. The Tonneliers did not behave, however, with the same warmth as the tender Countess, and it was easy to see that Mesdames Bacquière and Van-Cuyp could not picture to themselves, without envy, the shower of gold and diamonds about to fall into the lap of their cousin. Messrs. Bacquière and Van-Cuyp were naturally the first sufferers, and their charming wives made them understand, at intervals during the day, that they thoroughly despised them. It was a bitter Sunday for those poor fellows. The Tonnelier family also felt that little more was to be done there, and left the next morning with a very cold adieu.

The conduct of the Countess was more noble. She declared she would wait upon her dearly beloved Charlotte from the altar to the very threshold of the nuptial chamber; that she would arrange her trousseau, and that the marriage should take place from her house.

"Deuce take me, my dear Countess!" cried the General, "I must declare one thing—you astonish me. I was unjust, cruelly unjust, toward you. I reproach myself, on my faith! I believed you worldly, interested, not open-hearted. But you are none of these; you are an excellent woman—a heart of gold—a noble soul! My dear friend, you have found the best way to convert

me. I have always believed the religion of honor was sufficient for a man—eh, Camors? But I am not an unbeliever, my dear Countess, and, on my sacred word, when I see a perfect creature like you, I desire to believe everything she believes, if only to be pleasant to her!"

When Camors, who was not quite so innocent, asked himself what was the secret of his aunt's politic conduct, but little effort was necessary to understand it.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had finally convinced herself that the General had an aneurism, flattered herself that the cares of matrimony would hasten the doom of her old friend. In any event, he was past seventy years of age. But Charlotte was young, and so also was Sigismund. Sigismund could become tender; if necessary, could quietly court the young Marquise until the day when he could marry her, with all her appurtenances, over the mausoleum of the General. It was for this that Madame de la Roche-Jugan, crushed for a moment under the unexpected blow that ruined her hopes, had modified her tactics and drawn her batteries, so to speak, under cover of the enemy. This was what she was contriving while she was weeping behind the curtain.

Camors's personal feelings at the announcement of this marriage were not of the most agreeable description. First, he was obliged to acknowledge that he had unjustly judged Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, and that at the moment of his accusing her of speculating on his small fortune, she was offering to sacrifice for him the annual seven hundred thousand francs of the General.

He felt his vanity injured, that he had not had the best part of this affair. Besides, he felt obliged to stifle from this moment the secret passion with which the beautiful and singular girl had inspired him. Wife or widow of the General, it was clear that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had forever escaped him. To seduce the wife of this good old man from whom he accepted such favors, or even to marry her, widowed and rich, after refusing her when poor, were equal unworthiness and baseness that honor forbade in the same degree and with the same rigor as if this honor, which he made the only law of his life, were not a mockery and an empty word.

Camors, however, did not fail to comprehend the position in this light, and he resigned himself to it.

During the four or five days he remained at Campvallon his conduct was perfect. The delicate and reserved attentions with which he surrounded Mademoiselle d'Estrelles were tinged with a melancholy that showed her at the same time his gratitude, his respect, and his regrets.

M. de Campvallon had not less reason to congratulate himself on the conduct of the young Count. He entered into the folly of his host with affectionate grace. He spoke to him little of the beauty of his *fiancée;* much of her high moral qualities; and let him see his most flattering confidence in the future of this union.

On the eve of his departure Camors was summoned into the General's study. Handing his young relative a check for three hundred thousand francs, the General said:

"My dear young friend, I ought to tell you, for the

peace of your conscience, that I have informed Mademoiselle d'Estrelles of this little service I render you. She has a great deal of love and affection for you, my dear young friend; be sure of that.

"She therefore received my communication with sincere pleasure. I also informed her that I did not intend taking any receipt for this sum, and that no reclamation of it should be made at any time, on any account.

"Now, my dear Camors, do me one favor. To tell you my inmost thought, I shall be most happy to see you carry into execution your project of laudable ambition. My own new position, my age, my tastes, and those I perceive in the Marquise, claim all my leisure—all my liberty of action. Consequently, I desire as soon as possible to present you to my generous and faithful constituents, as well for the Corps Législatif as for the General Council. You had better make your preliminary arrangements as soon as possible. Why should you defer it? You are very well cultivated—very capable. Well, let us go ahead—let us begin at once. What do you say?"

"I should prefer, General, to be more mature; but it would be both folly and ingratitude in me not to accede to your kind wish. What shall I do first?"

"Well, my young friend, instead of leaving to-morrow for Paris, you must go to your estate at Reuilly: go there and conquer Des Rameures."

"And who are the Des Rameures, General?"

"You do not know the Des Rameures? The deuce! no; you can not know them! That is unfortunate, too.

Des Rameures is a clever fellow, a very clever fellow, and all-powerful in his neighborhood. He is an original, as you will see; and with him lives his niece, a charming woman. I tell you, my boy, you must please them, for Des Rameures is the master of the county. He protects me, or else, upon my honor, I should be stopped on the road!"

"But, General, what shall I do to please this Des Rameures?"

"You will see him. He is, as I tell you, a great oddity. He has not been in Paris since 1825; he has a horror of Paris and Parisians. Very well, it only needs a little tact to flatter his views on that point. We always need a little tact in this world, young man."

"But his niece, General?"

"Ah, the deuce! You must please the niece also. He adores her, and she manages him completely, although he grumbles a little sometimes."

"And what sort of woman is she?"

"Oh, a respectable woman—a perfectly respectable woman. A widow; somewhat a devotee, but very well informed. A woman of great merit."

"But what course must I take to please this lady?"

"What course? By my faith, young man, you ask a great many questions. I never yet learned to please a woman. I am green as a goose with them always. It is a thing I can not understand; but as for you, my young comrade, you have little need to be instructed in that matter. You can't fail to please her; you have only to make yourself agreeable. But you will know

how to do it—you will conduct yourself like an angel, I am sure."

"Captivate Des Rameures and his niece—this is your advice!"

Early next morning Camors left the Château de Campvallon, armed with these imperfect instructions; and, further, with a letter from the General to Des Rameures.

He went in a hired carriage to his own domain of Reuilly, which lay ten leagues off. While making this transit he reflected that the path of ambition was not one of roses; and that it was hard for him, at the outset of his enterprise, to be compelled to encounter two faces likely to be as disquieting as those of Des Rameures and his niece.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD DOMAIN OF REUILLY

HE domain of Reuilly consisted of two farms and of a house of some pretension, inhabited formerly by the maternal family of M. de Camors. He had never before seen this property when he reached it on the evening of a beautiful summer day. A long and gloomy avenue of elms, interlacing their thick branches, led to the dwelling-house, which was quite unequal to the imposing approach to it; for it was but an inferior construction of the past century, ornamented simply by a gable and a bull's-eye, but flanked by a lordly dovecote.

It derived a certain air of dignity from two small terraces, one above the other, in front of it, while the triple flight of steps was supported by balusters of granite. Two animals, which had once, perhaps, resembled lions, were placed one upon each side of the balustrade at the platform of the highest terrace; and they had been staring there for more than a hundred and fifty years. Behind the house stretched the garden; and in its midst, mounted on a stone arch, stood a dismal sun-dial with hearts and spades painted between its figures; while the trees around it were trimmed into

the shapes of confessionals and chess-pawns. To the right, a labyrinth of young trees, similarly clipped in the fashion of the time, led by a thousand devious turns to a mysterious valley, where one heard continually a low, sad murmur. This proceeded from a nymph in terra-cotta, from whose urn dripped, day and night, a thin rill of water into a small fishpond, bordered by grand old poplars, whose shadows threw upon its surface, even at mid-day, the blackness of Acheron.

Camors's first reflection at viewing this prospect was an exceedingly painful one; and the second was even more so.

At another time he would doubtless have taken an interest in searching through these souvenirs of the past for traces of an infant nurtured there, who had a mother, and who had perhaps loved these old relics. But his system did not admit of sentiment, so he crushed the ideas that crowded to his mind, and, after a rapid glance around him, called for his dinner.

The old steward and his wife—who for thirty years had been the sole inhabitants of Reuilly—had been informed of his coming. They had spent the day in cleaning and airing the house; an operation which added to the discomfort they sought to remove, and irritated the old residents of the walls, while it disturbed the sleep of hoary spiders in their dusty webs. A mixed odor of the cellar, of the sepulchre, and of an old coach, struck Camors when he penetrated into the principal room, where his dinner was to be served.

Taking up one or two flickering candles, the like of which he had never seen before, Camors proceeded to

inspect the quaint portraits of his ancestors, who seemed to stare at him in great surprise from their cracked canvases. They were a dilapidated set of old nobles, one having lost a nose, another an arm, others again sections of their faces. One of them—a chevalier of St. Louis—had received a bayonet thrust through the centre in the riotous times of the Revolution; but he still smiled at Camors, and sniffed at a flower, despite the daylight shining through him.

Camors finished his inspection, thinking to himself they were a highly respectable set of ancestors, but not worth fifteen francs apiece. The housekeeper had passed half the previous night in slaughtering various dwellers in the poultry-yard; and the results of the sacrifice now successively appeared, swimming in butter. Happily, however, the fatherly kindness of the General had despatched a hamper of provisions from Campvallon, and a few slices of *pâté*, accompanied by sundry glasses of Château-Yquem helped the Count to combat the dreary sadness with which his change of residence, solitude, the night, and the smoke of his candles, all conspired to oppress him.

Regaining his usual good spirits, which had deserted him for a moment, he tried to draw out the old steward, who was waiting on him. He strove to glean from him some information of the Des Rameures; but the old servant, like every Norman peasant, held it as a tenet of faith that he who gave a plain answer to any question was a dishonored man. With all possible respect he let Camors understand plainly that he was not to he deceived by his affected ignorance into any belief that

M. le Comte did not know a great deal better than he who and what M. des Rameures was—where he lived, and what he did; that M. le Comte was his master, and as such was entitled to his respect, but that he was nevertheless a Parisian, and—as M. des Rameures said—all Parisians were jesters.

Camors, who had taken an oath never to get angry, kept it now; drew from the General's old cognac a fresh supply of patience, lighted a cigar, and left the room.

For a few moments he leaned over the balustrade of the terrace and looked around. The night, clear and beautiful, enveloped in its shadowy veil the wide-stretching fields, and a solemn stillness, strange to Parisian ears, reigned around him, broken only at intervals by the distant bay of a hound, rising suddenly, and dying into peace again. His eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, Camors descended the terrace stairs and passed into the old avenue, which was darker and more solemn than a cathedral-aisle at midnight, and thence into an open road into which it led by chance.

Strictly speaking, Camors had never, until now, been out of Paris; for wherever he had previously gone, he had carried its bustle, worldly and artificial life, play, and the races with him; and the watering-places and the seaside had never shown him true country, or provincial life. It gave him a sensation for the first time; —but the sensation was an odious one.

As he advanced up this silent road, without houses or lights, it seemed to him he was wandering amid the

desolation of some lunar region. This part of Normandy recalled to him the least cultivated parts of Brittany. It was rustic and savage, with its dense shrubbery, tufted grass, dark valleys, and rough roads.

Some dreamers love this sweet but severe nature, even at night; they love the very things that grated most upon the pampered senses of Camors, who strode on in deep disgust, flattering himself, however, that he should soon reach the Boulevard de Madeleine. But he found, instead, peasants' huts scattered along the side of the road, their low, mossy roofs seeming to spring from the rich soil like an enormous fungus growth. Two or three of the dwellers in these huts were taking the fresh evening air on their thresholds, and Camors could distinguish through the gloom their heavy figures and limbs, roughened by coarse toil in the fields, as they stood mute, motionless, and ruminating in the darkness like tired beasts.

Camors, like all men possessed by a dominant idea, had, ever since he adopted the religion of his father as his rule of life, taken the pains to analyze every impression and every thought. He now said to himself, that between these countrymen and a refined man like himself there was doubtless a greater difference than between them and their beasts of burden; and this reflection was as balm to the scornful aristocracy that was the cornerstone of his theory. Wandering on to an eminence, his discouraged eye swept but a fresh horizon of apple-trees and heads of barley, and he was about to turn back when a strange sound suddenly arrested his

steps. It was a concert of voice and instruments, which in this lost solitude seemed to him like a dream, or a miracle. The music was good—even excellent. He recognized a prelude of Bach, arranged by Gounod. Robinson Crusoe, on discovering the footprint in the sand, was not more astonished than Camors at finding in this desert so lively a symptom of civilization.

Filled with curiosity, and led by the melody he heard, he descended cautiously the little hill, like a king's son in search of the enchanted princess. The palace he found in the middle of the path, in the shape of the high back wall of a dwelling, fronting on another road. One of the upper windows on this side, however, was open; a bright light streamed from it, and thence he doubted not the sweet sounds came.

To an accompaniment of the piano and stringed instruments rose a fresh, flexible woman's voice, chanting the mystic words of the master with such expression and power as would have given even him delight. Camors, himself a musician, was capable of appreciating the masterly execution of the piece; and was so much struck by it that he felt an irresistible desire to see the performers, especially the singer. With this impulse he climbed the little hedge bordering the road, placed himself on the top, and found himself several feet above the level of the lighted window. He did not hesitate to use his skill as a gymnast to raise himself to one of the branches of an old oak stretching across the lawn; but during the ascent he could not disguise from himself that his was scarcely a dignified position for the future deputy of the district. He almost laughed

aloud at the idea of being surprised in this position by the terrible Des Rameures, or his niece.

He established himself on a large, leafy branch, directly in front of the interesting window; and notwithstanding that he was at a respectful distance, his glance could readily penetrate into the chamber where the concert was taking place. A dozen persons, as he judged, were there assembled; several women, of different ages, were seated at a table working; a young man appeared to be drawing; while other persons lounged on comfortable seats around the room. Around the piano was a group which chiefly attracted the attention of the young Count. At the instrument was seated a grave young girl of about twelve years; immediately behind her stood an old man, remarkable for his great height, his head bald, with a crown of white hair, and his bushy black eyebrows. He played the violin with priestly dignity. Seated near him was a man of about fifty, in the dress of an ecclesiastic, and wearing a huge pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, who played the violincello with great apparent gusto.

Between them stood the singer. She was a pale brunette, slight and graceful, and apparently not more than twenty-five years of age. The somewhat severe oval of her face was relieved by a pair of bright black eyes that seemed to grow larger as she sang. One hand rested gently on the shoulder of the girl at the piano, and with this she seemed to keep time, pressing gently on the shoulder of the performer to stimulate her zeal. And that hand was delicious!

A hymn by Palestrina had succeeded the Bach pre-

lude. It was a quartette, to which two new voices lent their aid. The old priest laid aside his violoncello, stood up, took off his spectacles, and his deep bass completed the full measure of the melody.

After the quartette followed a few moments of general conversation, during which—after embracing the child pianist, who immediately left the room—the songstress walked to the window. She leaned out as if to breathe the fresh air, and her profile was sharply relieved against the bright light behind her, in which the others formed a group around the priest, who once more donned his spectacles, and drew from his pocket a paper that appeared to be a manuscript.

The lady leaned from the window, gently fanning herself, as she looked now at the sky, now at the dark landscape. Camors imagined he could distinguish her gentle breathing above the sound of the fan; and leaning eagerly forward for a better view, he caused the leaves to rustle slightly. She started at the sound, then remained immovable, and the fixed position of her head showed that her gaze was fastened upon the oak in which he was concealed.

He felt the awkwardness of his position, but could not judge whether or not he was visible to her; but, under the danger of her fixed regard, he passed the most painful moments of his life.

She turned into the room and said, in a calm voice, a few words which brought three or four of her friends to the window; and among them Camors recognized the old man with the violin.

The moment was a trying one. He could do noth-

ing but lie still in his leafy retreat—silent and immovable as a statue. The conduct of those at the window went far to reassure him, for their eyes wandered over the gloom with evident uncertainty, convincing him that his presence was only suspected, not discovered. But they exchanged animated observations, to which the hidden Count lent an attentive ear. Suddenly a strong voice—which he recognized as belonging to him of the violin—rose over them all in the pleasing order: "Loose the dog!"

This was sufficient for Camors. He was not a coward; he would not have budged an inch before an enraged tiger; but he would have travelled a hundred miles on foot to avoid the shadow of ridicule. Profiting by the warning and a moment when he seemed unobserved, he slid from the tree, jumped into the next field, and entered the wood at a point somewhat farther down than the spot where he had scaled the hedge. This done, he resumed his walk with the assured tread of a man who had a right to be there. He had gone but a few steps, when he heard behind him the wild barking of the dog, which proved his retreat had been opportune.

Some of the peasants he had noticed as he passed before, were still standing at their doors. Stopping before one of them he asked:

"My friend, to whom does that large house below there, facing the other road, belong? and whence comes that music?"

"You probably know that as well as I," replied the man, stolidly.

"Had I known, I should hardly have asked you," said Camors.

The peasant did not deign further reply. His wife stood near him; and Camors had remarked that in all classes of society women have more wit and good-humor than their husbands. Therefore he turned to her and said:

"You see, my good woman, I am a stranger here. To whom does that house belong? Probably to Monsieur des Rameures?"

"No, no," replied the woman, "Monsieur des Rameures lives much farther on."

"Ah! Then who lives here?"

"Why, Monsieur de Tècle, of course!"

"Ah, Monsieur de Tècle! But tell me, he does not live alone? There is a lady who sings—his wife?—his sister? Who is she?"

"Ah, that is his daughter-in-law, Madame de Tècle —Madame Elise, who——"

"Ah! thank you, thank you, my good woman! You have children? Buy them sabots with this," and dropping a gold piece in the lap of the obliging peasant, Camors walked rapidly away. Returning home the road seemed less gloomy and far shorter than when he came. As he strode on, humming the Bach prelude, the moon rose, the country looked more beautiful, and, in short, when he perceived, at the end of its gloomy avenue, his château bathed in the white light, he found the spectacle rather enjoyable than otherwise. And when he had once more ensconced himself in the maternal domicile, and inhaled the odor of damp paper and

mouldy trees that constituted its atmosphere, he found great consolation in the reflection that there existed not very far away from him a young woman who possessed a charming face, a delicious voice, and a pretty name.

Next morning, after plunging into a cold bath, to the profound astonishment of the old steward and his wife, the Comte de Camors went to inspect his farms. He found the buildings very similar in construction to the dams of beavers, though far less comfortable; but he was amazed to hear his farmers arguing, in their *patois*, on the various modes of culture and crops, like men who were no strangers to all modern improvements in agriculture. The name of Des Rameures frequently occurred in the conversation as confirmation of their own theories, or experiments. M. des Rameures gave preference to this manure, to this machine for winnowing; this breed of animals was introduced by him. M. des Rameures did this, M. des Rameures did that, and the farmers did like him, and found it to their advantage. Camors found the General had not exaggerated the local importance of this personage, and that it was most essential to conciliate him. Resolving therefore to call on him during the day, he went to breakfast.

This duty toward himself fulfilled, the young Count lounged on the terrace, as he had the evening before, and smoked his cigar. Though it was near midday, it was doubtful to him whether the solitude and silence appeared less complete and oppressive than on the preceding night. A hushed cackling of fowls, the drowsy

hum of bees, and the muffled chime of a distant bell—these were all the sounds to be heard.

Camors lounged on the terrace, dreaming of his club, of the noisy Paris crowd, of the rumbling omnibuses, of the playbill of the little kiosk, of the scent of heated asphalt—and the memory of the least of these enchantments brought infinite peace to his soul. The inhabitant of Paris has one great blessing, which he does not take into account until he suffers from its loss—one great half of his existence is filled up without the least trouble to himself. The all-potent vitality which ceaselessly envelops him takes away from him in a vast degree the exertion of amusing himself. The roar of the city, rising like a great bass around him, fills up the gaps in his thoughts, and never leaves that disagreeable sensation—a void.

There is no Parisian who is not happy in the belief that he makes all the noise he hears, writes all the books he reads, edits all the journals on which he breakfasts, writes all the vaudevilles on which he sups, and invents all the *bon mots* he repeats.

But this flattering allusion vanishes the moment chance takes him a mile away from the Rue Vivienne. The proof confounds him, for he is bored terribly, and becomes sick of himself. Perhaps his secret soul, weakened and unnerved, may even be assailed by the suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all! But no! He returns to Paris; the collective electricity again inspires him; he rebounds; he recovers; he is busy, keen to discern, active, and recognizes once more, to his intense satisfaction, that he is after all one of the

elect of God's creatures—momentarily degraded, it may be, by contact with the inferior beings who people the departments.

Camors had within himself more resources than most men to conquer the blue-devils; but in these early hours of his experience in country life, deprived of his club, his horses, and his cook, banished from all his old haunts and habits, he began to feel terribly the weight of time. He, therefore, experienced a delicious sensation when suddenly he heard that regular beat of hoofs upon the road which to his trained ear announced the approach of several riding-horses. The next moment he saw advancing up his shaded avenue two ladies on horseback, followed by a groom with a black cockade.

Though quite amazed at this charming spectacle, Camors remembered his duty as a gentleman and descended the steps of the terrace. But the two ladies, at sight of him, appeared as surprised as himself, suddenly drew rein and conferred hastily. Then, recovering, they continued their way, traversed the lower court below the terraces, and disappeared in the direction of the lake.

As they passed the lower balustrade Camors bowed low, and they returned his salutation by a slight inclination; but he was quite sure, in spite of the veils that floated from their riding-hats, that he recognized the black-eyed singer and the young pianist. After a moment he called to his old steward:

"Monsieur Leonard," he said, "is this a public way?"

"It certainly is not a public way, Monsieur le Comte," replied Leonard.

"Then what do these ladies mean by using this road?"

"Bless me, Monsieur le Comte, it is so long since any of the owners have been at Reuilly! These ladies mean no harm by passing through your woods; and sometimes they even stop at the château while my wife gives them fresh milk. Shall I tell them that this displeases Monsieur le Comte?"

"My good Leonard, why the deuce do you suppose it displeases me? I only asked for information. And now who are the ladies?"

"Oh! Monsieur, they are quite respectable ladies; Madame de Tècle, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Marie."

"So? And the husband of Madame, Monsieur de Tècle, never rides out with them?"

"Heavens! no, Monsieur. *He* never rides with them." And the old steward smiled a dry smile. "*He* has been among the dead men for a long time, as Monsieur le Comte well knows."

"Granting that I know it, Monsieur Leonard, I wish it understood these ladies are not to be interfered with. You comprehend?"

Leonard seemed pleased that he was not to be the bearer of any disagreeable message; and Camors, suddenly conceiving that his stay at Reuilly might be prolonged for some time, reëntered the château and examined the different rooms, arranging with the steward the best plan of making the house habitable. The little town of I——, but two leagues distant, afforded all the means, and M. Leonard proposed going there at once to confer with the architect.

CHAPTER VII

ELISE DE TÈCLE

EANTIME Camors directed his steps toward the residence of M. des Rameures, of which he at last obtained correct information. He took the same road as the preceding evening, passed the monastic-looking building that held Madame de Tècle, glanced at the old oak that had served him for an observatory, and about a mile farther on he discovered the small house with towers that he sought.

It could only be compared to those imaginary edifices of which we have all read in childhood's happy days in taking text, under an attractive picture: "The castle of M. de Valmont was agreeably situated at the summit of a pretty hill." It had a really picturesque surrounding of fields sloping away, green as emerald, dotted here and there with great bouquets of trees, or cut by walks adorned with huge roses or white bridges thrown over rivulets. Cattle and sheep were resting here and there, which might have figured at the Opéra Comique, so shining were the skins of the cows and so white the wool of the sheep. Camors swung open the gate, took the first road he saw, and reached the top of the hill amid trees and flowers. An old servant slept on a bench before the door, smiling in his dreams.

Camors waked him, inquired for the master of the house, and was ushered into a vestibule. Thence he entered a charming apartment, where a young lady in a short skirt and round hat was arranging bouquets in Chinese vases.

She turned at the noise of the opening door, and Camors saw—Madame de Tècle!

As he saluted her with an air of astonishment and doubt, she looked fixedly at him with her large eyes. He spoke first, with more of hesitation than usual.

"Pardon me, Madame, but I inquired for Monsieur des Rameures."

"He is at the farm, but will soon return. Be kind enough to wait."

She pointed to a chair, and seated herself, pushing away with her foot the branches that strewed the floor.

"But, Madame, in the absence of Monsieur des Rameures may I have the honor of speaking with his niece?"

The shadow of a smile flitted over Madame de Tècle's brown but charming face. "His niece?" she said: "I am his niece."

"*You!* Pardon me, Madame, but I thought—they said—I expected to find an elderly—a—person—that is, a respectable—" he hesitated, then added simply—"and I find I am in error."

Madame de Tècle seemed completely unmoved by this compliment.

"Will you be kind enough, Monsieur," she said, "to let me know whom I have the honor of receiving?"

"I am Monsieur de Camors——"

"Ah! Then I have excuses also to make. It was probably you whom we saw this morning. We have been very rude—my daughter and I—but we were ignorant of your arrival; and Reuilly has been so long deserted."

"I sincerely hope, Madame, that your daughter and yourself will make no change in your rides."

Madame de Tècle replied by a movement of the hand that implied certainly she appreciated the offer, and certainly she should not accept it. Then there was a pause long enough to embarrass Camors, during which his eye fell upon the piano, and his lips almost formed the original remark—"You are a musician, Madame." Suddenly recollecting his tree, however, he feared to betray himself by the allusion, and was silent.

"You come from Paris, Monsieur de Camors?" Madame de Tècle at length asked.

"No, Madame, I have been passing several weeks with my kinsman, General de Campvallon, who has also the honor, I believe, to be a friend of yours; and who has requested me to call upon you."

"We are delighted that you have done so; and what an excellent man the General is!"

"Excellent indeed, Madame." There was another pause.

"If you do not object to a short walk in the sun," said Madame de Tècle at length, "let us walk to meet my uncle. We are almost sure to meet him." Camors bowed. Madame de Tècle rose and rang the bell—"Ask Mademoiselle Marie," she said to the servant, "to be kind enough to put on her hat and join us."

A moment after, Mademoiselle Marie entered, cast on the stranger the steady, frank look of an inquisitive child, bowed slightly to him, and they all left the room by a door opening on the lawn.

Madame de Tècle, while responding courteously to the graceful speeches of Camors, walked on with a light and rapid step, her fairy-like little shoes leaving their impression on the smooth fine sand of the path.

She walked with indescribable, unconscious grace; with that supple, elastic undulation which would have been coquettish had it not been undeniably natural. Reaching the wall that enclosed the right side of the park, she opened a wicket that led into a narrow path through a large field of ripe corn. She passed into this path, followed in single file by Mademoiselle Marie and by Camors. Until now the child had been very quiet, but the rich golden corn-tassels, entangled with bright daisies, red poppies, and hollyhocks, and the humming concert of myriads of flies—blue, yellow, and reddish-brown—which sported amid the sweets, excited her beyond self-control. Stopping here and there to pluck a flower, she would turn and cry, "Pardon, Monsieur;" until, at length, on an apple-tree growing near the path she descried on a low branch a green apple, no larger than her finger. This temptation proved irresistible, and with one spring into the midst of the corn, she essayed to reach the prize, if Providence would permit. Madame de Tècle, however, would not permit. She seemed much displeased, and said, sharply:

"Marie, my child! In the midst of the corn! Are you crazy!"

The child returned promptly to the path, but unable to conquer her wish for the apple, turned an imploring eye to Camors and said, softly: "Pardon, Monsieur, but that apple would make my bouquet complete."

Camors had only to reach up, stretch out his hand, and detach the branch from the tree.

"A thousand thanks!" cried the child, and adding this crowning glory to her bouquet, she placed the whole inside the ribbon around her hat and walked on with an air of proud satisfaction.

As they approached the fence running across the end of the field, Madame de Tècle suddenly said: "My uncle, Monsieur;" and Camors, raising his head, saw a very tall man looking at them over the fence and shading his eyes with his hand. His robust limbs were clad in gaiters of yellow leather with steel buttons, and he wore a loose coat of maroon velvet and a soft felt hat. Camors immediately recognized the white hair and heavy black eyebrows as the same he had seen bending over the violin the night before.

"Uncle," said Madame de Tècle, introducing the young Count by a wave of the hand: "This is Monsieur de Camors."

"Monsieur de Camors," repeated the old man, in a deep and sonorous voice, "you are most welcome;" and opening the gate he gave his guest a soft, brown hand, as he continued: "I knew your mother intimately, and am charmed to have her son under my roof. Your mother was a most amiable person, Monsieur, and certainly merited—" The old man hesitated, and finished his sentence by a sonorous "Hem!" that re-

sounded and rumbled in his chest as if in the vault of a church.

Then he took the letter Camors handed to him, held it a long distance from his eyes, and began reading it. The General had told the Count it would be impolite to break suddenly to M. des Rameures the plan they had concocted. The latter, therefore, found the note only a very warm introduction of Camors. The post-script gave him the announcement of the marriage.

"The devil!" he cried. "Did you know this, Elise? Campvallon is to be married!"

All women, widows, matrons, or maids, are deeply interested in matters pertaining to marriage.

"What, uncle! The General! Can it be? Are you sure?"

"Um—rather. He writes the news himself. Do you know the lady, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles is my cousin," Camors replied.

"Aha! That is right; and she is of a certain age?"

"She is about twenty-five."

M. des Rameures received this intelligence with one of the resonant coughs peculiar to him.

"May I ask, without indiscretion, whether she is endowed with a pleasing person?"

"She is exceedingly beautiful," was the reply.

"Hem! So much the better. It seems to me the General is a little old for her: but every one is the best judge of his own affairs. Hem! the best judge of his own affairs. Elise, my dear, whenever you are ready we will follow you. Pardon me, Monsieur le

Comte, for receiving you in this rustic attire, but I am a laborer. *Agricola*—a mere herdsman—*custos gregis*, as the poet says. Walk before me, Monsieur le Comte, I beg you. Marie, child, respect my corn!

"And can we hope, Monsieur de Camors, that you have the happy idea of quitting the great Babylon to install yourself among your rural possessions? It will be a good example, Monsieur—an excellent example! For unhappily to-day more than ever we can say with the poet:

'Non ullus aratro
Dignus honos; squalent abductis arva colonis,
Et—et—'

"And, by gracious! I've forgotten the rest—poor memory! Ah, young sir, never grow old—never grow old!"

"'Et curvæ rigidum falces conflantur in ensem,'"

said Camors, continuing the broken quotation.

"Aha! you quote Virgil. You read the classics. I am charmed, really charmed. That is not the characteristic of our rising generation, for modern youth has an idea it is bad taste to quote the ancients. But that is not my idea, young sir—not in the least. Our fathers quoted freely because they were familiar with them. And Virgil is my poet. Not that I approve of all his theories of cultivation. With all the respect I accord him, there is a great deal to be said on that point; and his plan of breeding in particular will never do—never do! Still, he is delicious, eh? Very well, Mon-

sieur Camors, now you see my little domain—*mea paupera regna*—the retreat of the sage. Here I live, and live happily, like an old shepherd in the golden age—loved by my neighbors, which is not easy; and venerating the gods, which is perhaps easier. Ah, young sir, as you read Virgil, you will excuse me once more. It was for me he wrote:

'Fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota,
Et fontes sacros frigus captabis opacum.'

And this as well:

'Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestes,
Panaque, Silvanumque senem!'"

"*Nymphasque sorores!*" finished Camors, smiling and moving his head slightly in the direction of Madame de Tècle and her daughter, who preceded them.

"Quite to the point. That is pure truth!" cried M. des Rameures, gayly. "Did you hear that, niece?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And did you understand it, niece?"

"No, uncle."

"I do not believe you, my dear! I do not believe you!" The old man laughed heartily. "Do not believe her, Monsieur de Camors; women have the faculty of understanding compliments in every language."

This conversation brought them to the château, where they sat down on a bench before the drawing-room windows to enjoy the view.

Camors praised judiciously the well-kept park, ac-

cepted an invitation to dinner the next week, and then discreetly retired, flattering himself that his introduction had made a favorable impression upon M. des Rameures, but regretting his apparent want of progress with the fairy-footed niece.

He was in error.

"This youth," said M. des Rameures, when he was left alone with Madame de Tècle, "has some touch of the ancients, which is something; but he still resembles his father, who was vicious as sin itself. His eyes and his smile recall some traits of his admirable mother; but positively, my dear Elise, he is the portrait of his father, whose manners and whose principles they say he has inherited."

"Who says so, uncle?"

"Current rumor, niece."

"Current rumor, my dear uncle, is often mistaken, and always exaggerates. For my part, I like the young man, who seems thoroughly refined and at his ease."

"Bah! I suppose because he compared you to a nymph in the fable."

"If he compared me to a nymph in the fable he was wrong; but he never addressed to me a word in French that was not in good taste. Before we condemn him, uncle, let us see for ourselves. It is a habit you have always recommended to me, you know."

"You can not deny, niece," said the old man with irritation, "that he exhales the most decided and disagreeable odor of Paris! He is too polite—too studied! Not a shadow of enthusiasm—no fire of youth! He never laughs as I should wish to see a man of his

age laugh; a young man should roar to split his waistband!"

"What! you would see him merry so soon after losing his father in such a tragic manner, and he himself nearly ruined! Why, uncle, what can you mean?"

"Well, well, perhaps you are right. I retract all I have said against him. If he be half ruined I will offer him my advice—and my purse if he need it—for the sake of the memory of his mother, whom you resemble. Ah, 'tis thus we end all our disputes, naughty child! I grumble; I am passionate; I act like a Tartar. Then you speak with your good sense and sweetness, my darling, and the tiger becomes a lamb. All unhappy beings whom you approach in the same way submit to your subtle charm. And that is the reason why my old friend, La Fontaine, said of you:

'Sur différentes fleurs l'abeille se repose,
Et fait du miel de toute chose!'"

CHAPTER VIII

A DISH OF POLITICS

LISE DÈ TECLE was thirty years of age, but appeared much younger. At seventeen she had married, under peculiar conditions, her cousin Roland de Tècle. She had been left an orphan at an early age and educated by her mother's brother, M. des Rameures. Roland lived very near her father's estate. Everything brought them together—the wishes of the family, compatibility of fortune, their relations as neighbors, and a personal sympathy. They were both charming; they were destined for each other from infancy, and the time fixed for their marriage was the nineteenth birthday of Elise. In anticipation of this happy event the Comte de Tècle rebuilt almost entirely one wing of his castle for the exclusive use of the young pair. Roland was continually present, superintending and urging on the work with all the ardor of a lover.

One morning loud and alarming cries from the new wing roused all the inhabitants of the castle; the Count hurried to the spot, and found his son stunned and bleeding in the arms of one of the workmen. He had fallen from a high scaffolding to the pavement. For

several months the unfortunate young man hovered between life and death; but in the paroxysms of fever he never ceased calling for his cousin—his betrothed; and they were obliged to admit the young girl to his bedside. Slowly he recovered, but was ever after disfigured and lame; and the first time they allowed him to look in a glass he had a fainting-fit that proved almost fatal.

But he was a youth of high principle and true courage. On recovering from his swoon he wept a flood of bitter tears, which would not, however, wash the scars from his disfigured face. He prayed long and earnestly; then shut himself up with his father. Each wrote a letter, the one to M. des Rameures, the other to Elise. M. des Rameures and his niece were then in Germany. The excitement and fatigue consequent upon nursing her cousin had so broken her health that the physicians urged a trial of the baths of Ems. There she received these letters; they released her from her engagement and gave her absolute liberty.

Roland and his father implored her not to return in haste; explained that their intention was to leave the country in a few weeks' time and establish themselves at Paris; and added that they expected no answer, and that their resolution—impelled by simple justice to her—was irrevocable.

Their wishes were complied with. No answer came.

Roland, his sacrifice once made, seemed calm and resigned; but he fell into a sort of languor, which made fearful progress and hinted at a speedy and fatal termination, for which in fact he seemed to long. One even-

ing they had taken him to the lime-tree terrace at the foot of the garden. He gazed with absent eye on the tints with which the setting sun purpled the glades of the wood, while his father paced the terrace with long strides—smiling as he passed him and hastily brushing away a tear as he turned his back.

Suddenly Elise de Tècle appeared before them, like an angel dropped from heaven. She knelt before the crippled youth, kissed his hand, and, brightening him with the rays of her beautiful eyes, told him she never had loved him half so well before. He felt she spoke truly; he accepted her devotion, and they were married soon after.

Madame de Tècle was happy—but she alone was so. Her husband, notwithstanding the tenderness with which she treated him—notwithstanding the happiness which he could not fail to read in her tranquil glance—notwithstanding the birth of a daughter—seemed never to console himself. Even with her he was always possessed by a cold constraint; some secret sorrow consumed him, of which they found the key only on the day of his death.

"My darling," he then said to his young wife—"my darling, may God reward you for your infinite goodness! Pardon me, if I never have told you how entirely I love you. With a face like mine, how could I speak of love to one like you! But my poor heart has been brimming over with it all the while. Oh, Elise! how I have suffered when I thought of what I was before—how much more worthy of you! But we shall be reunited, dearest—shall we not?—where I shall be as

perfect as you, and where I may tell you how much I adore you! Do not weep for me, my own Elise! I am happy now, for the first time, for I have dared to open my heart to you. Dying men do not fear ridicule. Farewell, Elise—darling—wife! I love you!" These tender words were his last.

After her husband's death, Madame de Tècle lived with her father-in-law, but passed much of her time with her uncle. She busied herself with the greatest solicitude in the education of her daughter, and kept house for both the old men, by both of whom she was equally idolized.

From the lips of the priest at Reuilly, whom he called on next day, Camors learned some of these details, while the old man practiced the violoncello with his heavy spectacles on his nose. Despite his fixed resolution of preserving universal scorn, Camors could not resist a vague feeling of respect for Madame de Tècle; but it did not entirely eradicate the impure sentiment he was disposed to dedicate to her. Fully determined to make her, if not his victim, at least his ally, he felt that this enterprise was one of unusual difficulty. But he was energetic, and did not object to difficulties—especially when they took such charming shape as in the present instance.

His meditations on this theme occupied him agreeably the rest of that week, during which time he overlooked his workmen and conferred with his architect. Besides, his horses, his books, his domestics, and his journals arrived successively to dispel *ennui*. Therefore he looked remarkably well when he jumped out of

his dog-cart the ensuing Monday in front of M. des Rameures's door under the eyes of Madame de Tècle. As the latter gently stroked with her white hand the black and smoking shoulder of the thoroughbred Fitz-Aymon, Camors was for the first time presented to the Comte de Tècle, a quiet, sad, and taciturn old gentleman. The curé, the sub-prefect of the district and his wife, the tax-collector, the family physician, and the tutor completed, as the journals say, the list of the guests.

During dinner Camors, secretly excited by the immediate vicinity of Madame de Tècle, essayed to triumph over that hostility that the presence of a stranger invariably excites in the midst of intimacies which it disturbs. His calm superiority asserted itself so mildly it was pardoned for its grace. Without a gayety unbecoming his mourning, he nevertheless made such lively sallies and such amusing jokes about his first mishaps at Reuilly as to break up the stiffness of the party. He conversed pleasantly with each one in turn, and, seeming to take the deepest interest in his affairs, put him at once at his ease.

He skilfully gave M. des Rameures the opportunity for several happy quotations; spoke naturally to him of artificial pastures, and artificially of natural pastures; of breeding and of non-breeding cows; of Dishley sheep—and of a hundred other matters he had that morning crammed from an old encyclopædia and a county almanac.

To Madame de Tècle directly he spoke little, but he did not speak one word during the dinner that was not

meant for her; and his manner to women was so caressing, yet so chivalric, as to persuade them, even while pouring out their wine, that he was ready to die for them. The dear charmers thought him a good, simple fellow, while he was the exact reverse.

On leaving the table they went out of doors to enjoy the starlight evening, and M. des Rameures—whose natural hospitality was somewhat heightened by a goblet of his own excellent wine—said to Camors:

"My dear Count, you eat honestly, you talk admirably, you drink like a man. On my word, I am disposed to regard you as perfection—as a paragon of neighbors—if in addition to all the rest you add the crowning one. Do you love music?"

"Passionately!" answered Camors, with effusion.

"Passionately? *Bravo!* That is the way one should love everything that is worth loving. I am delighted, for we make here a troupe of fanatical melomaniacs, as you will presently perceive. As for myself, I scrape wildly on the violin, as a simple country amateur—*Orpheus in silvis*. Do not imagine, however, Monsieur le Comte, that we let the worship of this sweet art absorb all our faculties—all our time—certainly not. When you take part in our little reunions, which of course you will do, you will find we disdain no pursuit worthy of thinking beings. We pass from music to literature—to science—even to philosophy; but we do this—I pray you to believe—without pedantry and without leaving the tone of familiar converse. Sometimes we read verses, but we never make them; we love the ancients and do not fear the moderns: we only fear

those who would lower the mind and debase the heart. We love the past while we render justice to the present; and flatter ourselves at not seeing many things that to you appear beautiful, useful, and true.

"Such are we, my young friend. We call ourselves the 'Colony of Enthusiasts,' but our malicious neighbors call us the 'Hôtel de Rambouillet.' Envy, you know, is a plant that does not flourish in the country; but here, by way of exception, we have a few jealous people—rather bad for them, but of no consequence to us.

"We are an odd set, with the most opposite opinions. For me, I am a Legitimist; then there is Durocher, my physician and friend, who is a rabid Republican; Hédouin, the tutor, is a parliamentarian; while Monsieur our sub-prefect is a devotee to the government, as it is his duty to be. Our curé is a little Roman—I am Gallican—*et sic ceteris*. Very well—we all agree wonderfully for two reasons: first, because we are sincere, which is a very rare thing; and then because all opinions contain at bottom some truth, and because, with some slight mutual concessions, all really honest people come very near having the same opinions.

"Such, my dear Count, are the views that hold in my drawing-room, or rather in the drawing-room of my niece; for if you would see the divinity who makes all our happiness—look at her! It is in deference to her good taste, her good sense, and her moderation, that each of us avoids that violence and that passion which warps the best intentions. In one word, to speak truly, it is love that makes our common tie and our

mutual protection. We are all in love with my niece —myself first, of course; next Durocher, for thirty years; then the sub-prefect and all the rest of them.

"You, too, Curé! you know that you are in love with Elise, in all honor and all good faith, as we all are, and as Monsieur de Camors shall soon be, if he is not so already—eh, Monsieur le Comte?"

Camors protested, with a sinister smile, that he felt very much inclined to fulfil the prophecy of his host; and they reëntered the dining-room to find the circle increased by the arrival of several visitors. Some of these rode, others came on foot from the country-seats around.

M. des Rameures soon seized his violin; while he tuned it, little Marie seated herself at the piano, and her mother, coming behind her, rested her hand lightly on her shoulder, as if to beat the measure.

"The music will be nothing new to you," Camors's host said to him. "It is simply Schubert's Serenade, which we have arranged, or deranged, after our own fancy; of which you shall judge. My niece sings, and the curate and I—*Arcades ambo*—respond successively —he on the bass-viol and I on my Stradivarius. Come, my dear Curé, let us begin—*incipe, Mopse, prior.*"

In spite of the masterly execution of the old gentleman and of the delicate science of the curé, it was Madame de Tècle who appeared to Camors the most remarkable of the three *virtuosi*. The calm repose of her features, and the gentle dignity of her attitude, contrasting with the passionate swell of her voice, he found most attractive.

In his turn he seated himself at the piano, and played a difficult accompaniment with real taste; and having a good tenor voice, and a thorough knowledge of its powers, he exerted them so effectually as to produce a profound sensation. During the rest of the evening he kept much in the background in order to observe the company, and was much astonished thereby. The tone of this little society, as much removed from vulgar gossip as from affected pedantry, was truly elevated. There was nothing to remind him of a porter's lodge, as in most provincial salons; or of the green-room of a theatre, as in many salons of Paris; nor yet, as he had feared, of a lecture-room.

There were five or six women—some pretty, all well bred—who, in adopting the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing, nor the desire to please. But they all seemed subject to the same charm; and that charm was sovereign. Madame de Tècle, half hidden on her sofa, and seemingly busied with her embroidery, animated all by a glance, softened all by a word. The glance was inspiring; the word always appropriate. Her decision on all points they regarded as final—as that of a judge who sentences, or of a woman who is beloved.

No verses were read that evening, and Camors was not bored. In the intervals of the music, the conversation touched on the new comedy by Augier; the last work of Madame Sand; the latest poem of Tennyson; or the news from America.

"My dear Mopsus," M. des Rameures said to the curé, "you were about to read us your sermon on

superstition last Thursday, when you were interrupted by that joker who climbed the tree in order to hear you better. Now is the time to recompense us. Take this seat and we will all listen to you."

The worthy curé took the seat, unfolded his manuscript, and began his discourse, which we shall not here report: profiting by the example of our friend Sterne, not to mingle the sacred with the profane.

The sermon met with general approval, though some persons, M. des Rameures among them, thought it above the comprehension of the humble class for whom it was intended. M. de Tècle, however, backed by republican Durocher, insisted that the intelligence of the people was underrated; that they were frequently debased by those who pretended to speak only up to their level—and the passages in dispute were retained.

How they passed from the sermon on superstition to the approaching marriage of the General, I can not say; but it was only natural after all, for the whole country, for twenty miles around, was ringing with it. This theme excited Camors's attention at once, especially when the sub-prefect intimated with much reserve that the General, busied with his new surroundings, would probably resign his office as deputy.

"But that would be embarrassing," exclaimed Des Rameures. "Who the deuce would replace him? I give you warning, Monsieur Prefect, if you intend imposing on us some Parisian with a flower in his buttonhole, I shall pack him back to his club—him, his flower, and his buttonhole! You may set that down for a sure thing——"

"Dear uncle!" said Madame de Tècle, indicating Camors with a glance.

"I understand you, Elise," laughingly rejoined M. des Rameures, "but I must beg Monsieur de Camors to believe that I do not in any case intend to offend him. I shall also beg him to tolerate the monomania of an old man, and some freedom of language with regard to the only subject which makes him lose his *sangfroid*."

"And what is that subject, Monsieur?" said Camors, with his habitual captivating grace of manner.

"That subject, Monsieur, is the arrogant supremacy assumed by Paris over all the rest of France. I have not put my foot in the place since 1825, in order to testify the abhorrence with which it inspires me. You are an educated, sensible young man, and, I trust, a good Frenchman. Very well! Is it right, I ask, that Paris shall every morning send out to us our ideas ready-made, and that all France shall become a mere humble, servile *faubourg* to the capital? Do me the favor, I pray you, Monsieur, to answer that?"

"There is doubtless, my dear sir," replied Camors, "some excess in this extreme centralization of France; but all civilized countries must have their capitals, and a head is just as necessary to a nation as to an individual."

"Taking your own image, Monsieur, I shall turn it against you. Yes, doubtless a head is as necessary to a nation as to an individual; if, however, the head becomes monstrous and deformed, the seat of intelligence will be turned into that of idiocy, and in place of a man

of intellect, you have a hydrocephalus. Pray give heed to what Monsieur the Sub-prefect, may say in answer to what I shall ask him. Now, my dear Sub-prefect, be frank. If to-morrow, the deputation of this district should become vacant, can you find within its broad limits, or indeed within the district, a man likely to fill all functions, good and bad?"

"Upon my word," answered the official, "if you continue to refuse the office, I really know of no one else fit for it."

"I shall persist all my life, Monsieur, for at my age assuredly I shall not expose myself to the buffoonery of your Parisian jesters."

"Very well! In that event you will be obliged to take some stranger—perhaps, even one of those Parisian jesters."

"You have heard him, Monsieur de Camors," said M. des Rameures, with exultation. "This district numbers six hundred thousand souls, and yet does not contain within it the material for one deputy. There is no other civilized country, I submit, in which we can find a similar instance so scandalous. For the people of France this shame is reserved exclusively, and it is your Paris that has brought it upon us. Paris, absorbing all the blood, life, thought, and action of the country, has left a mere geographical skeleton in place of a nation! These are the benefits of your centralization, since you have pronounced that word, which is quite as barbarous as the thing itself."

"But pardon me, uncle," said Madame de Tècle, quietly plying her needle, "I know nothing of these

matters, but it seems to me that I have heard you say this centralization was the work of the Revolution and of the First Consul. Why, therefore, do you call Monsieur de Camors to account for it? That certainly does not seem to me just."

"Nor does it seem so to me," said Camors, bowing to Madame de Tècle.

"Nor to me either," rejoined M. des Rameures, smiling.

"However, Madame," resumed Camors, "I may to some extent be held responsible in this matter, for though, as you justly suggest, I have not brought about this centralization, yet I confess I strongly approve the course of those who did."

"Bravo! So much the better, Monsieur. I like that. One should have his own positive opinions, and defend them."

"Monsieur," said Camors, "I shall make an exception in your honor, for when I dine out, and especially when I dine well, I always have the same opinion with my host; but I respect you too highly not to dare to differ with you. Well, then, I think the revolutionary Assembly, and subsequently the First Consul, were happily inspired in imposing a vigorous centralized political administration upon France. I believe, indeed, that it was indispensable at the time, in order to mold and harden our social body in its new form, to adjust it in its position, and fix it firmly under the new laws—that is, to establish and maintain this powerful French unity which has become our national peculiarity, our genius and our strength."

"You speak rightly, sir," exclaimed Durocher.

"*Parbleu!* unquestionably you are right," warmly rejoined M. des Rameures. "Yes, that is quite true. The excessive centralization of which I complain has had its hour of utility, nay, even of necessity, I will admit; but, Monsieur, in what human institution do you pretend to implant the absolute, the eternal? Feudalism, also, my dear sir, was a benefit and a progress in its day, but that which was a benefit yesterday may it not become an evil to-morrow—a danger? That which is progress to-day, may it not one hundred years hence have become mere routine, and a downright trammel? Is not that the history of the world? And if you wish to know, Monsieur, by what sign we may recognize the fact that a social or political system has attained its end, I will tell you: it is when it is manifest only in its inconveniences and abuses. Then the machine has finished its work, and should be replaced. Indeed, I declare that French centralization has reached its critical term, that fatal point at which, after protecting, it oppresses; at which, after vivifying, it paralyzes; at which, having saved France, it crushes her."

"Dear uncle, you are carried away by your subject," said Madame de Tècle.

"Yes, Elise, I am carried away, I admit, but I am right. Everything justifies me—the past and the present, I am sure; and so will the future, I fear. Did I say the past? Be assured, Monsieur de Camors, I am not a narrow-minded admirer of the past. Though a Legitimist from personal affections, I am a downright

Liberal in principles. You know that, Durocher? Well, then, in short, formerly between the Alps, the Rhine, and the Pyrenees, was a great country which lived, thought, and acted, not exclusively through its capital, but for itself. It had a head, assuredly; but it had also a heart, muscles, nerves, and veins with blood in them, and yet the head lost nothing by that. There was then a France, Monsieur. The province had an existence, subordinate doubtless, but real, active, and independent. Each government, each office, each parliamentary centre was a living intellectual focus. The great provincial institutions and local liberties exercised the intellect on all sides, tempered the character, and developed men. And now note well, Durocher! If France had been centralized formerly as to-day, your dear Revolution never would have occurred—do you understand? Never! because there would have been no men to make it. For may I not ask, whence came that prodigious concourse of intelligences all fully armed, and with heroic hearts, which the great social movement of 1780 suddenly brought upon the scene? Please recall to mind the most illustrious men of that era—lawyers, orators, soldiers. How many were from Paris? All came from the provinces, the fruitful womb of France! But to-day we have simply need of a deputy, peaceful times; and yet, out of six hundred thousand souls, as we have seen, we can not find one suitable man. Why is this the case, gentlemen? Because upon the soil of uncentralized France men grew, while only functionaries germinate in the soil of centralized France."

"God bless you, Monsieur!" said the Sub-prefect, with a smile.

"Pardon me, my dear Sub-prefect, but you, too, should understand that I really plead your cause as well as my own, when I claim for the provinces, and for all the functions of provincial life, more independence, dignity, and grandeur. In the state to which these functions are reduced at present, the administration and the judiciary are equally stripped of power, prestige, and patronage. You smile, Monsieur, but no longer, as formerly, are they the centres of life, of emulation, and of light, civic schools and manly gymnasiums; they have become merely simple, passive clockwork; and that is the case with the rest, Monsieur de Camors. Our municipal institutions are a mere farce, our provincial assemblies only a name, our local liberties naught! Consequently, we have not now a man for a deputy. But why should we complain? Does not Paris undertake to live, to think for us? Does she not deign to cast to us, as of yore the Roman Senate cast to the suburban plebeians, our food for the day—bread and vaudevilles—*panem et circenses*. Yes, Monsieur, let us turn from the past to the present—to France of to-day! A nation of forty millions of people who await each morning from Paris the signal to know whether it is day or night, or whether, indeed, they shall laugh or weep! A great people, once the noblest, the cleverest in the world, repeating the same day, at the same hour, in all the salons, and at all the crossways in the empire, the same imbecile gabble engendered the evening before in the mire of the boulevards. I tell you, Monsieur, it is

humiliating that all Europe, once jealous of us, should now shrug her shoulders in our faces. Besides, it is fatal even for Paris, which, permit me to add, drunk with prosperity in its haughty isolation and self-fetishism, not a little resembles the Chinese Empire—a focus of warmed-over, corrupt, and frivolous civilization! As for the future, my dear sir, may God preserve me from despair, since it concerns my country! This age has already seen great things, great marvels, in fact; for I beg you to remember I am by no means an enemy to my time. I approve the Revolution, liberty, equality, the press, railways, and the telegraph; and as I often say to Monsieur le Curé, every cause that would live must accommodate itself cheerfully to the progress of its epoch, and study how to serve itself by it. Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide. Indeed, Monsieur, I trust this century will see one more great event, the end of this Parisian tyranny, and the resuscitation of provincial life; for I must repeat, my dear sir, that your centralization, which was once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen! It is a horrible instrument of oppression and tyranny, ready-made for all hands, suitable for every despotism, and under it France stifles and wastes away. You must agree with me yourself, Durocher; in this sense the Revolution overshot its mark, and placed in jeopardy even its purposes; for you, who love liberty, and do not wish it merely for yourself alone, as some of your friends do, but for all the world, surely you can not admire centralization, which proscribes liberty as manifestly as night obscures the day. As for my part, gentlemen, there are

two things which I love equally—liberty and France. Well, then, as I believe in God, do I believe that both must perish in the throes of some convulsive catastrophe if all the life of the nation shall continue to be concentrated in the brain, and the great reform for which I call is not made: if a vast system of local franchise, if provincial institutions, largely independent and conformable to the modern spirit, are not soon established to yield fresh blood for our exhausted veins, and to fertilize our impoverished soil. Undoubtedly the work will be difficult and complicated; it will demand a firm resolute hand, but the hand that may accomplish it will have achieved the most patriotic work of the century. Tell that to your sovereign, Monsieur Sub-prefect; say to him that if he do that, there is one old French heart that will bless him. Tell him, also, that he will encounter much passion, much derision, much danger, peradventure; but that he will have a commensurate recompense when he shall see France, like Lazarus, delivered from its swathings and its shroud, rise again, sound and whole, to salute him!"

These last words the old gentleman had pronounced with fire, emotion, and extraordinary dignity; and the silence and respect with which he had been listened to were prolonged after he had ceased to speak. This appeared to embarrass him, but taking the arm of Camors he said, with a smile, "'*Semel insanivimus omnes.*' My dear sir, every one has his madness. I trust that mine has not offended you. Well, then, prove it to me by accompanying me on the piano in this song of the sixteenth century."

Camors complied with his usual good taste; and the song of the sixteenth century terminated the evening's entertainment; but the young Count, before leaving, found the means of causing Madame de Tècle the most profound astonishment. He asked her, in a low voice, and with peculiar emphasis, whether she would be kind enough, at her leisure, to grant him the honor of a moment's private conversation.

Madame de Tècle opened still wider those large eyes of hers, blushed slightly, and replied that she would be at home the next afternoon at four o'clock.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE CONQUERS PHILOSOPHY

O M. de Camors, in principle it was a matter of perfect indifference whether France was centralized or decentralized. But his Parisian instinct induced him to prefer the former. In spite of this preference, he would not have scrupled to adopt the opinions of M. des Rameures, had not his own fine tact shown him that the proud old gentleman was not to be won by submission.

He therefore reserved for him the triumph of his gradual conversion. Be that as it might, it was neither of centralization nor of decentralization that the young Count proposed to speak to Madame de Tècle, when, at the appointed hour, he presented himself before her. He found her in the garden, which, like the house, was of an ancient, severe, and monastic style. A terrace planted with lime-trees extended on one side of the garden. It was at this spot that Madame de Tècle was seated under a group of lime-trees, forming a rustic bower.

She was fond of this place, because it recalled to her that evening when her unexpected apparition had suddenly inspired with a celestial joy the pale, disfigured face of her betrothed.

She was seated on a low chair beside a small rustic table, covered with pieces of wool and silk; her feet rested on a stool, and she worked on a piece of tapestry, apparently with great tranquillity.

M. de Camors, an expert in all the niceties and exquisite devices of the feminine mind, smiled to himself at this audience in the open air. He thought he fathomed its meaning. Madame de Tècle desired to deprive this interview of the confidential character which closed doors would have given it.

It was the simple truth. This young woman, who was one of the noblest of her sex, was not at all simple. She had not passed ten years of her youth, her beauty, and her widowhood without receiving, under forms more or less direct, dozens of declarations that had inspired her with impressions, which, although just, were not always too flattering to the delicacy and discretion of the opposite sex. Like all women of her age, she knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it. She had invariably turned into the broad road of friendship all those she had surprised rambling within the prohibited limits of love. The request of M. de Camors for a private interview had seriously preoccupied her since the previous evening. What could be the object of this mysterious interview? She puzzled her brain to imagine, but could not divine.

It was not probable that M. de Camors, at the beginning of their acquaintance, would feel himself entitled to declare a passion. However vividly the famed gallantry of the young Count rose to her memory, she thought so noted a lady-killer as he might adopt un-

usual methods, and might think himself entitled to dispense with much ceremony in dealing with an humble provincial.

Animated by these ideas, she resolved to receive him in the garden, having remarked, during her short experience, that open air and a wide, open space were not favorable to bold wooers.

M. de Camors bowed to Madame de Tècle as an Englishman would have bowed to his queen; then seating himself, drew his chair nearer to hers, mischievously perhaps, and lowering his voice into a confidential tone, said: "Madame, will you permit me to confide a secret to you, and to ask your counsel?"

She raised her graceful head, fixed upon the Count her soft, bright gaze, smiled vaguely, and by a slight movement of the hand intimated to him, "You surprise me; but I will listen to you."

"This is my first secret, Madame—I desire to become deputy for this district."

At this unexpected declaration, Madame de Tècle looked at him, breathed a slight sigh of relief, and gravely awaited what he had to say.

"The General de Campvallon, Madame," continued the young man, "has manifested a father's kindness to me. He intends to resign in my favor, and has not concealed from me that the support of your uncle is indispensable to my success as a candidate. I have therefore come here, by the General's advice, in the hope of obtaining this support, but the ideas and opinions expressed yesterday by your uncle appear to me so directly

opposed to my pretensions that I feel truly discouraged. To be brief, Madame, in my perplexity I conceived the idea—indiscreet doubtless—to appeal to your kindness, and ask your advice—which I am determined to follow, whatever it may be."

"But, Monsieur! you embarrass me greatly," said the young woman, whose pretty face, at first clouded, brightened up immediately with a frank smile.

"I have no special claims on your kindness—on the contrary perhaps—but I am a human being, and you are charitable. Well, in truth, Madame, this matter seriously concerns my fortune, my future, and my whole destiny. This opportunity which now presents itself for me to enter public life so young is exceptional. I should regret very much to lose it; would you therefore be so kind as to aid me?"

"But how can I?" replied Madame de Tècle. "I never interfere in politics, and that is precisely what you ask me."

"Nevertheless, Madame, I pray you not to oppose me."

"Why should I oppose you?"

"Ah, Madame! You have a right more than any other person to be severe. My youth was a little dissipated. My reputation, in some respects, is not overgood, I know, and I doubt not you may have heard so, and I can not help fearing it has inspired you with some dislike to me."

"Monsieur, we lived a retired life here. We know nothing of what passes in Paris. If we did, this would not prevent my assisting you, if I knew how, for I think

that serious and elevated labors could not fail happily to change your ordinary habits."

"It is truly a delicious thing," thought the young Count, "to mystify so spiritual a person."

"Madame," he continued, with his quiet grace, "I join in your hopes, and as you deign to encourage my ambition, I believe I shall succeed in obtaining your uncle's support. You know him well. What shall I do to conciliate him? What course shall I adopt?—because I can not do without his assistance. Were I to renounce that, I should be compelled to renounce my projects."

"It is truly difficult," said Madame de Tècle, with a reflective air—"very difficult!"

"Is it not, Madame?"

Camors's voice expressed such confidence and submission that Madame de Tècle was quite touched, and even the devil himself would have been charmed by it, had he heard it in Gehenna.

"Let me reflect on this a little," she said, and she placed her elbows on the table, leaned her head on her hands, her fingers, like a fan, half shading her eyes, while sparks of fire from her rings glittered in the sunshine, and her ivory nails shone against her smooth brow. M. de Camors continued to regard her with the same submissive and candid air.

"Well, Monsieur," she said at last, smiling, "I think you can do nothing better than keep on."

"Pardon me, but how?"

"By persevering in the same system you have already adopted with my uncle! Say nothing to him for the

present. Beg the General also to be silent. Wait quietly until intimacy, time, and your own good qualities have sufficiently prepared my uncle for your nomination. My *rôle* is very simple. I cannot, at this moment, aid you, without betraying you. My assistance would only injure you, until a change comes in the aspect of affairs. You must conciliate him."

"You overpower me," said Camors, "in taking you for my *confidante* in my ambitious projects, I have committed a blunder and an impertinence, which a slight contempt from you has mildly punished. But speaking seriously, Madame, I thank you with all my heart. I feared to find in you a powerful enemy, and I find in you a strong neutral, almost an ally."

"Oh! altogether an ally, however secret," responded Madame de Tècle, laughing. "I am glad to be useful to you; as I love General Campvallon very much, I am happy to enter into his views. Come here, Marie?" These last words were addressed to her daughter, who appeared on the steps of the terrace, her cheeks scarlet, and her hair dishevelled, holding a card in her hand. She immediately approached her mother, giving M. de Camors one of those awkward salutations peculiar to young, growing girls.

"Will you permit me," said Madame de Tècle, "to give to my daughter a few orders in English, which we are translating? You are too warm—do not run any more. Tell Rosa to prepare my bodice with the small buttons. While I am dressing, you may say your catechism to me."

"Yes, mother."

"Have you written your exercise?"

"Yes, mother. How do you say '*joli*' in English for a man?" asked the little girl.

"Why?"

"That question is in my exercise, to be said of a man who is '*beau, joli, distingué.*'"

"Handsome, nice, and charming," replied her mother.

"Very well, mother, this gentleman, our neighbor, is altogether handsome, nice, and charming."

"Silly child!" exclaimed Madame de Tècle, while the little girl rushed down the steps.

M. de Camors, who had listened to this dialogue with cool calmness, rose. "I thank you again, Madame," he said; "and will you now excuse me? You will allow me, from time to time, to confide in you my political hopes and fears?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

He bowed and retired. As he was crossing the courtyard, he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Marie. He gave her a most respectful bow. "Another time, Miss Mary, be more careful. I understand English perfectly well!"

Mademoiselle Marie remained in the same attitude, blushed up to the roots of her hair, and cast on M. de Camors a startled look of mingled shame and anger.

"You are not satisfied, Miss Mary," continued Camors.

"Not at all," said the child, quickly, her strong voice somewhat husky.

M. Camors laughed, bowed again, and departed,

leaving Mademoiselle Marie in the midst of the court, transfixed with indignation.

A few moments later Marie threw herself into the arms of her mother, weeping bitterly, and told her, through her tears, of her cruel mishap.

Madame de Tècle, in using this opportunity of giving her daughter a lesson on reserve and on *convenance*, avoided treating the matter too seriously and even seemed to laugh heartily at it, although she had little inclination to do so, and the child finished by laughing with her.

Camors, meanwhile, remained at home, congratulating himself on his campaign, which seemed to him, not without reason, to have been a masterpiece of stratagem. By a clever mingling of frankness and cunning he had quickly enlisted Madame de Tècle in his interest. From that moment the realization of his ambitious dreams seemed assured, for he was not ignorant of the incomparable value of woman's assistance, and knew all the power of that secret and continued labor, of those small but cumulative efforts, and of those subterranean movements which assimilate feminine influence with the secret and irresistible forces of nature. Another point gained—he had established a secret between that pretty woman and himself, and had placed himself on a confidential footing with her. He had gained the right to keep secret their clandestine words and private conversation, and such a situation, cleverly managed, might aid him to pass very agreeably the period occupied in his political canvass.

Camors on entering the house sat down to write the

General, to inform him of the opening of his operations, and admonish him to have patience. From that day he turned his attention to following up the two persons who could control his election.

His policy as regarded M. des Rameures was as simple as it was clever. It has already been clearly indicated, and further details would be unnecessary. Profiting by his growing familiarity as neighbor, he went to school, as it were, at the model farm of the gentleman-farmer, and submitted to him the direction of his own domain. By this quiet compliment, enhanced by his captivating courtesy, he advanced insensibly in the good graces of the old man. But every day, as he grew to know M. de Rameures better, and as he felt more the strength of his character, he began to fear that on essential points he was quite inflexible.

After some weeks of almost daily intercourse, M. des Rameures graciously praised his young neighbor as a charming fellow, an excellent musician, an amiable associate; but, regarding him as a possible deputy, he saw some things which might disqualify him. Madame de Tècle feared this, and did not hide it from M. de Camors. The young Count did not preoccupy himself so much on this subject as might be supposed, for his second ambition had superseded his first; in other words his fancy for Madame de Tècle had become more ardent and more pressing than his desire for the deputyship. We are compelled to admit, not to his credit, that he first proposed to himself to ensnare his charming neighbor as a simple pastime, as an interesting adventure, and, above all, as a work of art, which was extreme-

ly difficult and would greatly redound to his honor. Although he had met few women of her merit, he judged her correctly. He believed Madame de Tècle was not virtuous simply from force of habit or duty. She had passion. She was not a prude, but was chaste. She was not a devotee, but was pious. He discerned in her at the same time a spirit elevated, yet not narrow; lofty and dignified sentiments, and deeply rooted principles; virtue without rigor, pure and lambent as flame.

Nevertheless he did not despair, trusting to his own principles, to the fascinations of his manner and his previous successes. Instinctively, he knew that the ordinary forms of gallantry would not answer with her. All his art was to surround her with absolute respect, and to leave the rest to time and to the growing intimacy of each day.

There was something very touching to Madame de Tècle in the reserved and timid manner of this *mauvais sujet*, in her presence—the homage of a fallen spirit, as if ashamed of being such, in presence of a spirit of light.

Never, either in public or when *tête-à-tête*, was there a jest, a word, or a look which the most sensitive virtue could fear.

This young man, ironical with all the rest of the world, was serious with her. From the moment he turned toward her, his voice, face, and conversation became as serious as if he had entered a church. He had a great deal of wit, and he used and abused it beyond measure in conversations in the presence of Madame de Tècle, as if he were making a display of fireworks in her honor. But on coming to her this was

suddenly extinguished, and he became all submission and respect.

Not every woman who receives from a superior man such delicate flattery as this necessarily loves him, but she does like him. In the shadow of the perfect security in which M. de Camors had placed her, Madame de Tècle could not but be pleased in the company of the most distinguished man she had ever met, who had, like herself, a taste for art, music, and for high culture.

Thus these innocent relations with a young man whose reputation was rather equivocal could not but awaken in the heart of Madame de Tècle a sentiment, or rather an illusion, which the most prudish could not condemn.

Libertines offer to vulgar women an attraction which surprises, but which springs from a reprehensible curiosity. To a woman of society they offer another, more noble yet not less dangerous—the attraction of reforming them. It is rare that virtuous women do not fall into the error of believing that it is for virtue's sake alone such men love them. These, in brief, were the secret sympathies whose slight tendrils intertwined, blossomed, and flowered little by little in this soul, as tender as it was pure.

M. de Camors had vaguely foreseen all this: that which he had not foreseen was that he himself would be caught in his own snare, and would be sincere in the *rôle* which he had so judiciously adopted. From the first, Madame de Tècle had captivated him. Her very puritanism, united with her native grace and worldly elegance, composed a kind of daily charm which piqued

the imagination of the cold young man. If it was a powerful temptation for the angels to save the tempted, the tempted could not harbor with more delight the thought of destroying the angels. They dream, like the reckless Epicureans of the Bible, of mingling, in a new intoxication, the earth with heaven. To these sombre instincts of depravity were soon united in the feelings of Camors a sentiment more worthy of her. Seeing her every day with that childlike intimacy which the country encourages—enhancing the graceful movements of this accomplished person, ever self-possessed and equally prepared for duty or for pleasure—as animated as passion, yet as severe as virtue—he conceived for her a genuine worship. It was not respect, for that requires the effort of believing in such merits, and he did not wish to believe. He thought Madame de Tècle was born so. He admired her as he would admire a rare plant, a beautiful object, an exquisite work, in which nature had combined physical and moral grace with perfect proportion and harmony. His deportment as her slave when near her was not long a mere bit of acting. Our fair readers have doubtless remarked an odd fact: that where a reciprocal sentiment of two feeble human beings has reached a certain point of maturity, chance never fails to furnish a fatal occasion which betrays the secret of the two hearts, and suddenly launches the thunderbolt which has been gradually gathering in the clouds. This is the crisis of all love. This occasion presented itself to Madame de Tècle and M. de Camors in the form of an unpoetic incident.

It occurred at the end of October. Camors had gone

out after dinner to take a ride in the neighborhood. Night had already fallen, clear and cold; but as the Count could not see Madame de Tècle that evening, he began only to think of being near her, and felt that unwillingness to work common to lovers—striving, if possible, to kill time, which hung heavy on his hands.

He hoped also that violent exercise might calm his spirit, which never had been more profoundly agitated. Still young and unpractised in his pitiless system, he was troubled at the thought of a victim so pure as Madame de Tècle. To trample on the life, the repose, and the heart of such a woman, as the horse tramples on the grass of the road, with as little care or pity, was hard for a novice.

Strange as it may appear, the idea of marrying her had occurred to him. Then he said to himself that this weakness was in direct contradiction to his principles, and that she would cause him to lose forever his mastery over himself, and throw him back into the nothingness of his past life. Yet with the corrupt inspirations of his depraved soul he foresaw that the moment he touched her hands with the lips of a lover a new sentiment would spring up in her soul. As he abandoned himself to these passionate imaginings, the recollection of young Madame Lescande came back suddenly to his memory. He grew pale in the darkness. At this moment he was passing the edge of a little wood belonging to the Comte de Tècle, of which a portion had recently been cleared. It was not chance alone that had directed the Count's ride to this point. Madame de Tècle loved this spot, and had frequently taken him there,

and on the preceding evening, accompanied by her daughter and her father-in-law, had visited it with him.

The site was a peculiar one. Although not far from houses, the wood was very wild, as if a thousand miles distant from any inhabited place.

You would have said it was a virgin forest, untouched by the axe of the pioneer. Enormous stumps without bark, trunks of gigantic trees, covered the declivity of the hill, and barricaded, here and there, in a picturesque manner, the current of the brook which ran into the valley. A little farther up the dense wood of tufted trees contributed to diffuse that religious light half over the rocks, the brushwood and the fertile soil, and on the limpid water, which is at once the charm and the horror of old neglected woods. In this solitude, and on a space of cleared ground, rose a sort of rude hut, constructed by a poor devil who was a sabot-maker by trade, and who had been allowed to establish himself there by the Comte de Tècle, and to use the beech-trees to gain his humble living. This Bohemian interested Madame de Tècle, probably because, like M. de Camors, he had a bad reputation. He lived in his cabin with a woman who was still pretty under her rags, and with two little boys with golden curls.

He was a stranger in the neighborhood, and the woman was said not to be his wife. He was very taciturn, and his features seemed fine and determined under his thick, black beard.

Madame de Tècle amused herself seeing him make his sabots. She loved the children, who, though dirty,

were beautiful as angels; and she pitied the woman. She had a secret project to marry her to the man, in case she had not yet been married, which seemed probable.

Camors walked his horse slowly over the rocky and winding path on the slope of the hillock. This was the moment when the ghost of Madame Lescande had risen before him, and he believed he could almost hear her weep. Suddenly this illusion gave place to a strange reality. The voice of a woman plainly called him by name, in accents of distress—"Monsieur de Camors!"

Stopping his horse on the instant, he felt an icy shudder pass through his frame. The same voice rose higher and called him again. He recognized it as the voice of Madame de Tècle. Looking around him in the obscure light with a rapid glance, he saw a light shining through the foliage in the direction of the cottage of the sabot-maker. Guided by this, he put spurs to his horse, crossed the cleared ground up the hillside, and found himself face to face with Madame de Tècle. She was standing at the threshold of the hut, her head bare, and her beautiful hair dishevelled under a long, black lace veil. She was giving a servant some hasty orders. When she saw Camors approach, she came toward him.

"Pardon me," she said, "but I thought I recognized you, and I called you. I am so much distressed—so distressed! The two children of this man are dying!—What is to be done? Come in—come in, I beg of you!"

He leaped to the ground, threw the reins to his servant, and followed Madame de Tècle into the interior of the cabin.

The two children with the golden hair were lying side by side on a little bed, immovable, rigid, their eyes open and the pupils strangely dilated—their faces red, and agitated by slight convulsions. They seemed to be in the agony of death. The old doctor, Du Rocher, was leaning over them, looking at them with a fixed, anxious, and despairing eye. The mother was on her knees, her head clasped in her hands, and weeping bitterly. At the foot of the bed stood the father, with his savage mien—his arms crossed, and his eyes dry. He shuddered at intervals, and murmured, in a hoarse, hollow voice: "Both of them! Both of them!" Then he relapsed into his mournful attitude. M. Durocher, approached Camors quickly. "Monsieur," said he, "what can this be? I believe it to be poisoning, but can detect no definite symptoms: otherwise, the parents should know—but they know nothing! A sunstroke, perhaps; but as both were struck at the same time—and then at this season—ah! our profession is quite useless sometimes."

Camors made rapid inquiries. They had sought M. Durocher, who was dining with Madame de Tècle an hour before. He had hastened, and found the children already speechless, in a state of fearful congestion. It appeared they had fallen into this state when first attacked, and had become delirious.

Camors conceived an idea. He asked to see the clothes the children had worn during the day. The mother gave them to him. He examined them with care, and pointed out to the doctor several red stains on the poor rags. The doctor touched his forehead,

and turned over with a feverish hand the small linen—the rough waistcoat—searched the pockets, and found dozens of a small fruit-like cherries, half crushed. "Belladonna!" he exclaimed. "That idea struck me several times, but how could I be sure? You can not find it within twenty miles of this place, except in this cursed wood—of that I am sure."

"Do you think there is yet time?" asked the young Count, in a low voice. "The children seem to me to be very ill."

"Lost, I fear; but everything depends on the time that has passed, the quantity they have taken, and the remedies I can procure."

The old man consulted quickly with Madame de Tècle, who found she had not in her country pharmacy the necessary remedies, or counter-irritants, which the urgency of the case demanded. The doctor was obliged to content himself with the essence of coffee, which the servant was ordered to prepare in haste, and to send to the village for the other things needed.

"To the village!" cried Madame de Tècle. "Good heavens! it is four leagues—it is night, and we shall have to wait probably three or four hours!"

Camors heard this: "Doctor, write your prescription," he said: "Trilby is at the door, and with him I can do the four leagues in an hour—in one hour I promise to return here."

"Oh! thank you, Monsieur!" said Madame de Tècle.

He took the prescription which Dr. Durocher had rapidly traced on a leaf of his pocketbook, mounted his horse, and departed.

The highroad was fortunately not far distant. When he reached it he rode like the phantom horseman.

It was nine o'clock when Madame de Tècle witnessed his departure—it was a few moments after ten when she heard the tramp of his horse at the foot of the hill and ran to the door of the hut. The condition of the two children seemed to have grown worse in the interval, but the old doctor had great hopes in the remedies which Camors was to bring. She waited with impatience, and received him like the dawn of the last hope. She contented herself with pressing his hand, when, breathless, he descended from his horse. But this adorable creature threw herself on Trilby, who was covered with foam and steaming like a furnace.

"Poor Trilby," she said, embracing him in her two arms—"dear Trilby—good Trilby! you are half dead, are you not? But I love you well. Go quickly, Monsieur de Camors, I will attend to Trilby"—and while the young man entered the cabin, she confided Trilby to the charge of her servant, with orders to take him to the stable, and a thousand minute directions to take good care of him after his noble conduct. Dr. Durocher had to obtain the aid of Camors to pass the new medicine through the clenched teeth of the unfortunate children. While both were engaged in this work, Madame de Tècle was sitting on a stool with her head resting against the cabin wall. Durocher suddenly raised his eyes and fixed them on her.

"My dear Madame," he said, "you are ill. You have had too much excitement, and the odors here are insupportable. You must go home."

"I really do not feel very well," she murmured.

"You must go at once. We shall send you the news. One of your servants will take you home."

She raised herself, trembling; but one look from the young wife of the sabot-maker arrested her. To this poor woman, it seemed that Providence deserted her with Madame de Tècle.

"No!" she said with a divine sweetness; "I will not go. I shall only breathe a little fresh air. I will remain until they are safe, I promise you;" and she left the room smiling upon the poor woman. After a few minutes, Durocher said to M. de Camors:

"My dear sir, I thank you—but I really have no further need of your services; so you too may go and rest yourself, for you also are growing pale."

Camors, exhausted by his long ride, felt suffocated by the atmosphere of the hut, and consented to the suggestion of the old man, saying that he would not go far.

As he put his foot outside of the cottage, Madame de Tècle, who was sitting before the door, quickly rose and threw over his shoulders a cloak which they had brought for her. She then reseated herself without speaking.

"But you can not remain here all night," he said.

"I should be too uneasy at home."

"But the night is very cold—shall I make you a fire?"

"If you wish," she said.

"Let us see where we can make this little fire. In the midst of this wood it is impossible—we should have a conflagration to finish the picture. Can you walk?

Then take my arm, and we shall go and search for a place for our encampment."

She leaned lightly on his arm, and took a few steps with him toward the forest.

"Do you think they are saved?" she asked.

"I hope so," he replied. "The face of Doctor Durocher is more cheerful."

"Oh! how glad I am!"

Both of them stumbled over a root, and laughed like two children for several minutes.

"We shall soon be in the woods," said Madame de Tècle—"and I declare I can go no farther: good or bad, I choose this spot."

They were still quite close to the hut, but the branches of the old trees which had been spared by the axe spread like a sombre dome over their heads. Near by was a large rock, slightly covered with moss, and a number of old trunks of trees, on which Madame de Tècle took her seat.

"Nothing could be better," said Camors, gayly. "I must collect my materials."

A moment after he reappeared, bringing in his arms brushwood, and also a travelling-rug which his servant had brought him.

He got on his knees in front of the rock, prepared the fagots, and lighted them with a match. When the flame began to flicker on the rustic hearth Madame de Tècle trembled with joy, and held out both hands to the blaze.

"Ah! how nice that is!" she said; "and then it is so amusing; one would say we had been shipwrecked.

Now, Monsieur, if you would be perfect go and see what Durocher reports."

He ran to the hut. When he returned he could not avoid stopping half way to admire the elegant and simple *silhouette* of the young woman, defined sharply against the blackness of the wood, her fine countenance slightly illuminated by the firelight. The moment she saw him——

"Well!" she cried.

"A great deal of hope."

"Oh! what happiness, Monsieur!" She pressed his hand.

"Sit down there," she said.

He sat down on a rock contiguous to hers, and replied to her eager questions. He repeated, in detail, his conversation with the doctor, and explained at length the properties of belladonna. She listened at first with interest, but little by little, with her head wrapped in her veil and resting on the boughs interlaced behind her, she seemed to be uncomfortably resting from fatigue.

"You are likely to fall asleep there," he said, laughing.

"Perhaps!" she murmured—smiled, and went to sleep.

Her sleep resembled death, it was so profound, and so calm was the beating of her heart, so light her breathing.

Camors knelt down again by the fire, to listen breathlessly and to gaze upon her. From time to time he seemed to meditate, and the solitude was disturbed only by the rustling of the leaves. His eyes followed the

flickering of the flame, sometimes resting on the white cheek, sometimes on the grove, sometimes on the arches of the high trees, as if he wished to fix in his memory all the details of this sweet scene. Then his gaze rested again on the young woman, clothed in her beauty, grace, and confiding repose.

What heavenly thoughts descended at that moment on this sombre soul—what hesitation, what doubt assailed it! What images of peace, truth, virtue, and happiness passed into that brain full of storm, and chased away the phantoms of the sophistries he cherished! He himself knew, but never told.

The brisk crackling of the wood awakened her. She opened her eyes in surprise, and as soon as she saw the young man kneeling before her, addressed him——

"How are they now, Monsieur?"

He did not know how to tell her that for the last hour he had had but one thought, and that was of her. Durocher appeared suddenly before them.

"They are saved, Madame," said the old man, brusquely; "come quickly, embrace them, and return home, or we shall have to treat you to-morrow. You are very imprudent to have remained in this damp wood, and it was absurd of Monsieur to let you do so."

She took the arm of the old doctor, smiling, and reëntered the hut. The two children, now roused from the dangerous torpor, but who seemed still terrified by the threatened death, raised their little round heads. She made them a sign to keep quiet, and leaned over their pillow smiling upon them, and imprinted two kisses on their golden curls.

"To-morrow, my angels," she said. But the mother, half laughing, half crying, followed Madame de Tècle step by step, speaking to her, and kissing her garments.

"Let her alone," cried the old doctor, querulously. "Go home, Madame. Monsieur de Camors, take her home."

She was going out, when the man, who had not before spoken, and who was sitting in the corner of his hut as if stupefied, rose suddenly, seized the arm of Madame de Tècle, who, slightly terrified, turned round, for the gesture of the man was so violent as to seem menacing; his eyes, hard and dry, were fixed upon her, and he continued to press her arm with a contracted hand.

"My friend!" she said, although rather uncertain.

"Yes, your friend," muttered the man with a hollow voice; "yes, your friend."

He could not continue, his mouth worked as if in a convulsion, suppressed weeping shook his frame; he then threw himself on his knees, and they saw a shower of tears force themselves through the hands clasped over his face.

"Take her away, Monsieur," said the old doctor.

Camors gently pushed her out of the hut and followed her. She took his arm and descended the rugged path which led to her home.

It was a walk of twenty minutes from the wood. Half the distance was passed without interchanging a word. Once or twice, when the rays of the moon pierced through the clouds, Camors thought he saw

her wipe away a tear with the end of her glove. He guided her cautiously in the darkness, although the light step of the young woman was little slower in the obscurity. Her springy step pressed noiselessly the fallen leaves—avoided without assistance the ruts and marshes, as if she had been endowed with a magical clairvoyance. When they reached a crossroad, and Camors seemed uncertain, she indicated the way by a slight pressure of the arm. Both were no doubt embarrassed by the long silence—it was Madame de Tècle who first broke it.

"You have been very good this evening, Monsieur," she said in a low and slightly agitated voice.

"I love you so much!" said the young man.

He pronounced these simple words in such a deep impassioned tone that Madame de Tècle trembled and stood still in the road.

"Monsieur de Camors!"

"What, Madame?" he demanded, in a strange tone.

"Heavens!—in fact—nothing!" said she, "for this is a declaration of friendship, I suppose—and your friendship gives me much pleasure."

He let go her arm at once, and in a hoarse and angry voice said—"I am not your friend!"

"What are you then, Monsieur?"

Her voice was calm, but she recoiled a few steps, and leaned against one of the trees which bordered the road. The explosion so long pent up burst forth, and a flood of words poured from the young man's lips with inexpressible impetuosity.

"What I am I know not! I no longer know whether I am myself—if I am dead or alive—if I am good or bad—whether I am dreaming or waking. Oh, Madame, what I wish is that the day may never rise again—that this night would never finish—that I should wish to feel always—always—in my head, my heart, my entire being—that which I now feel, near you—of you—for you! I should wish to be stricken with some sudden illness, without hope, in order to be watched and wept for by you, like those children—and to be embalmed in your tears; and to see you bowed down in terror before me is horrible to me! By the name of your God, whom you have made me respect, I swear you are sacred to me—the child in the arms of its mother is not more so!"

"I have no fear," she murmured.

"Oh, no!—have no fear!" he repeated in a tone of voice infinitely softened and tender. "It is I who am afraid—it is I who tremble—you see it; for since I have spoken, all is finished. I expect nothing more—I hope for nothing—this night has no possible tomorrow. I know it. Your husband I dare not be—your lover I should not wish to be. I ask nothing of you—understand well! I should like to burn my heart at your feet, as on an altar—this is all. Do you believe me? Answer! Are you tranquil? Are you confident? Will you hear me? May I tell you what image I carry of you in the secret recesses of my heart? Dear creature that you are, you do not—ah, you do not know how great is your worth; and I fear to tell you, so much am I afraid of stripping you of your charms, or of one

of your virtues. If you had been proud of yourself, as you have a right to be, you would be less perfect, and I should love you less. But I wish to tell you how lovable and how charming you are. You alone do not know it. You alone do not see the soft flame of your large eyes—the reflection of your heroic soul on your young but serene brow. Your charm is over everything you do—your slightest gesture is engraven on my heart. Into the most ordinary duties of every-day life you carry a peculiar grace, like a young priestess who recites her daily devotions. Your hand, your touch, your breath purifies everything—even the most humble and the most wicked beings—and myself first of all!

"I am astonished at the words which I dare to pronounce, and the sentiments which animate me, to whom you have made clear new truths. Yes, all the rhapsodies of the poets, all the loves of the martyrs, I comprehend in your presence. This is truth itself. I understand those who died for their faith by the torture—because I should like to suffer for you—because I believe in you—because I respect you—I cherish you —I adore you!"

He stopped, shivering, and half prostrating himself before her, seized the end of her veil and kissed it.

"Now," he continued, with a kind of grave sadness, "go, Madame, I have forgotten too long that you require repose. Pardon me—proceed. I shall follow you at a distance, until you reach your home, to protect you—but fear nothing from me."

Madame de Tècle had listened, without once interrupting him even by a sigh. Words would only excite

the young man more. Probably she understood, for the first time in her life, one of those songs of love—one of those hymns alive with passion, which every woman wishes to hear before she dies. Should she die because she had heard it? She remained without speaking, as if just awakening from a dream, and said quite simply, in a voice as soft and feeble as a sigh, "My God!" After another pause she advanced a few steps on the road.

"Give me your arm as far as my house, Monsieur," she said.

He obeyed her, and they continued their walk toward the house, the lights of which they soon saw. They did not exchange a word—only as they reached the gate, Madame de Tècle turned and made him a slight gesture with her hand, in sign of adieu. In return, M. de Camors bowed low, and withdrew.

CHAPTER X

THE PROLOGUE TO THE TRAGEDY

HE Comte de Camors had been sincere. When true passion surprises the human soul, it breaks down all resolves, sweeps away all logic, and crushes all calculations.

In this lies its grandeur, and also its danger. It suddenly seizes on you, as the ancient god inspired the priestess on her tripod—speaks through your lips, utters words you hardly comprehend, falsifies your thoughts, confounds your reason, and betrays your secrets. When this sublime madness possesses you, it elevates you—it transfigures you. It can suddenly convert a common man into a poet, a coward into a hero, an egotist into a martyr, and Don Juan himself into an angel of purity.

With women—and it is to their honor—this metamorphosis can be durable, but it is rarely so with men. Once transported to this stormy sky, women frankly accept it as their proper home, and the vicinity of the thunder does not disquiet them.

Passion is their element—they feel at home there. There are few women worthy of the name who are not ready to put in action all the words which passion has

caused to bubble from their lips. If they speak of flight, they are ready for exile. If they talk of dying, they are ready for death. Men are far less consistent with their ideas.

It was not until late the next morning that Camors regretted his outbreak of sincerity; for, during the remainder of the night, still filled with his excitement, agitated and shaken by the passage of the god, sunk into a confused and feverish reverie, he was incapable of reflection. But when, on awakening, he surveyed the situation calmly and by the plain light of day, and thought over the preceding evening and its events, he could not fail to recognize the fact that he had been cruelly duped by his own nervous system. To love Madame de Tècle was perfectly proper, and he loved her still—for she was a person to be loved and desired—but to elevate that love or any other as the master of his life, instead of its plaything, was one of those weaknesses interdicted by his system more than any other. In fact, he felt that he had spoken and acted like a school-boy on a holiday. He had uttered words, made promises, and taken engagements on himself which no one demanded of him. No conduct could have been more ridiculous. Happily, nothing was lost. He had yet time to give his love that subordinate place which this sort of fantasy should occupy in the life of man. He had been imprudent; but this very imprudence might finally prove of service to him. All that remained of this scene was a declaration—gracefully made, spontaneous, natural—which subjected Madame de Tècle to the double charm of a mystic idolatry which

pleased her sex, and to a manly ardor which could not displease her.

He had, therefore, nothing to regret—although he certainly would have preferred, from the point of view of his principles, to have displayed a somewhat less childish weakness.

But what course should he now adopt? Nothing could be more simple. He would go to Madame de Tècle—implore her forgiveness—throw himself again at her feet, promising eternal respect, and succeed. Consequently, about ten o'clock, M. de Camors wrote the following note:

"MADAME:

"I can not leave without bidding you adieu, and once more demanding your forgiveness.

"Will you permit me?

"CAMORS."

This letter he was about despatching, when he received one containing the following words:

"I shall be happy, Monsieur, if you will call upon me to-day, about four o'clock.

"ELISE DE TECLE."

Upon which M. de Camors threw his own note in the fire, as entirely superfluous.

No matter what interpretation he put upon this note, it was an evident sign that love had triumphed and that virtue was defeated; for, after what had passed the previous evening between Madame de Tècle and himself, there was only one course for a virtuous woman to take; and that was never to see him again. To see him

was to pardon him; to pardon him was to surrender herself to him, with or without circumlocution. Camors did not allow himself to deplore any further an adventure which had so suddenly lost its gravity. He soliloquized on the weakness of women. He thought it bad taste in Madame de Tècle not to have maintained longer the high ideal his innocence had created for her. Anticipating the disenchantment which follows possession, he already saw her deprived of all her prestige, and ticketed in the museum of his amorous souvenirs.

Nevertheless, when he approached her house, and had the feeling of her near presence, he was troubled. Doubt and anxiety assailed him. When he saw through the trees the window of her room, his heart throbbed so violently that he had to sit down on the root of a tree for a moment.

"I love her like a madman!" he murmured; then leaping up suddenly he exclaimed, "But she is only a woman, after all—I shall go on!"

For the first time Madame de Tècle received him in her own apartment. This room M. de Camors had never seen. It was a large and lofty apartment, draped and furnished in sombre tints.

It contained gilded mirrors, bronzes, engravings, and old family jewelry lying on tables—the whole presenting the appearance of the ornamentation of a church.

In this severe and almost religious interior, however rich, reigned a vague odor of flowers; and there were also to be seen boxes of lace, drawers of perfumed linen, and that dainty atmosphere which ever accompanies refined women.

But every one has her personal individuality, and forms her own atmosphere which fascinates her lover. Madame de Tècle, finding herself almost lost in this very large room, had so arranged some pieces of furniture as to make herself a little private nook near the chimneypiece, which her daughter called, "My mother's chapel." It was there Camors now perceived her, by the soft light of a lamp, sitting in an armchair, and, contrary to her custom, having no work in her hands. She appeared calm, though two dark circles surrounded her eyes. She had evidently suffered much, and wept much.

On seeing that dear face, worn and haggard with grief, Camors forgot the neat phrases he had prepared for his entrance. He forgot all except that he really adored her.

He advanced hastily toward her, seized in his two hands those of the young woman and, without speaking, interrogated her eyes with tenderness and profound pity.

"It is nothing," she said, withdrawing her hand and bending her pale face gently; "I am better; I may even be very happy, if you wish it."

There was in the smile, the look, and the accent of Madame de Tècle something indefinable, which froze the blood of Camors.

He felt confusedly that she loved him, and yet was lost to him; that he had before him a species of being he did not understand, and that this woman, saddened, broken, and lost by love, yet loved something else in this world better even than that love.

She made him a slight sign, which he obeyed like a child, and he sat down beside her.

"Monsieur," she said to him, in a voice tremulous at first, but which grew stronger as she proceeded, "I heard you last night perhaps with a little too much patience. I shall now, in return, ask from you the same kindness. You have told me that you love me, Monsieur; and I avow frankly that I entertain a lively affection for you. Such being the case, we must either separate forever, or unite ourselves by the only tie worthy of us both. To part:—that will afflict me much, and I also believe it would occasion much grief to you. To unite ourselves:—for my own part, Monsieur, I should be willing to give you my life; but I can not do it, I can not wed you without manifest folly. You are younger than I; and as good and generous as I believe you to be, simple reason tells me that by so doing I should bring bitter repentance on myself. But there is yet another reason. I do not belong to myself, I belong to my daughter, to my family, to my past. In giving up my name for yours I should wound, I should cruelly afflict, all the friends who surround me, and, I believe, some who exist no longer. Well, Monsieur," she continued, with a smile of celestial grace and resignation, "I have discovered a way by which we yet can avoid breaking off an intimacy so sweet to both of us —in fact, to make it closer and more dear. My proposal may surprise you, but have the kindness to think over it, and do not say no, at once."

She glanced at him, and was terrified at the pallor which overspread his face. She gently took his hand, and said:

"Have patience!"

"Speak on!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"Monsieur," she continued, with her smile of angelic charity, "God be praised, you are quite young; in our society men situated as you are do not marry early, and I think they are right. Well, then, this is what I wish to do, if you will allow me to tell you. I wish to blend in one affection the two strongest sentiments of my heart! I wish to concentrate all my care, all my tenderness, all my joy on forming a wife worthy of you—a young soul who will make you happy, a cultivated intellect of which you can be proud. I will promise you, Monsieur, I will swear to you, to consecrate to you this sweet duty, and to consecrate to it all that is best in myself. I shall devote to it all my time, every instant of my life, as to the holy work of a saint. I swear to you that I shall be very happy if you will only tell me that you will consent to this."

His answer was an impatient exclamation of irony and anger: then he spoke:

"You will pardon me, Madame," he said, "if so sudden a change in my sentiments can not be as prompt as you wish."

She blushed slightly.

"Yes," she said, with a faint smile; "I can understand that the idea of my being your mother-in-law may seem strange to you; but in some years, even in a very few years' time, I shall be an old woman, and then it will seem to you very natural."

To consummate her mournful sacrifice, the poor woman did not shrink from covering herself, even in

the presence of the man she loved, with the mantle of old age.

The soul of Camors was perverted, but not base, and it was suddenly touched at this simple heroism. He rendered it the greatest homage he could pay, for his eyes suddenly filled with tears. She observed it, for she watched with an anxious eye the slightest impression she produced upon him. So she continued more cheerfully:

"And see, Monsieur, how this will settle everything. In this way we can continue to see each other without danger, because your little affianced wife will be always between us. Our sentiments will soon be in harmony with our new thoughts. Even your future prospects, which are now also mine, will encounter fewer obstacles, because I shall push them more openly, without revealing to my uncle what ought to remain a secret between us two. I can let him suspect my hopes, and that will enlist him in your service. Above all, I repeat to you that this will insure my happiness. Will you thus accept my maternal affection?"

M. de Camors, by a powerful effort of will, had recovered his self-control.

"Pardon me, Madame," he said, with a faint smile, "but I should wish at least to preserve honor. What do you ask of me? Do you yourself fully comprehend? Have you reflected well on this? Can either of us contract, without imprudence, an engagement of so delicate a nature for so long a time?"

"I demand no engagement of you," she replied, "for I feel that would be unreasonable. I only pledge

myself as far as I can, without compromising the future fate of my daughter. I shall educate her for you. I shall, in my secret heart, destine her for you, and it is in this light I shall think of you for the future. Grant me this. Accept it like an honest man, and remain single. This is probably a folly, but I risk my repose upon it. I will run all the risk, because I shall have all the joy. I have already had a thousand thoughts on this subject, which I can not yet tell you, but which I shall confess to God this night. I believe—I am convinced that my daughter, when I have done all that I can for her, will make an excellent wife for you. She will benefit you, and be an honor to you, and will, I hope, one day thank me with all her heart; for I perceive already what she wishes, and what she loves. You can not know, you can not even suspect—but I—I know it. There is already a woman in that child, and a very charming woman—much more charming than her mother, Monsieur, I assure you."

Madame de Tècle stopped suddenly, the door opened, and Mademoiselle Marie entered the room brusquely, holding in each hand a gigantic doll.

M. Camors rose, bowed gravely to her, and bit his lip to avoid smiling, which did not altogether escape Madame de Tècle.

"Marie!" she cried out, "really you are absurd with your dolls!"

"My dolls! I adore them!" replied Mademoiselle Marie.

"You are absurd! Go away with your dolls," said her mother.

"Not without embracing you," said the child.

She laid her dolls on the carpet, sprang on her mother's neck, and kissed her on both cheeks passionately, after which she took up her dolls, saying to them:

"Come, my little dears!" and left the room.

"Good heavens!" said Madame de Tècle, laughing, "this is an unfortunate incident; but I still insist, and I implore you to take my word. She will have sense, courage, and goodness. Now," she continued in a more serious tone, "take time to think over it, and return to give me your decision, should it be favorable. If not, we must bid each other adieu."

"Madame," said Camors, rising and standing before her, "I will promise never to address a word to you which a son might not utter to his mother. Is it not this which you demand?"

Madame de Tècle fixed upon him for an instant her beautiful eyes, full of joy and gratitude, then suddenly covered her face with her two hands.

"I thank you!" she murmured, "I am very happy!" She extended her hand, wet with her tears, which he took and pressed to his lips, bowed low, and left the room.

If there ever was a moment in his fatal career when the young man was really worthy of admiration, it was this. His love for Madame de Tècle, however unworthy of her it might be, was nevertheless great. It was the only true passion he had ever felt. At the moment when he saw this love, the triumph of which he thought certain, escape him forever, he was not only wounded in his pride but was crushed in his heart.

Yet he took the stroke like a gentleman. His agony was well borne. His first bitter words, checked at once, alone betrayed what he suffered.

He was as pitiless for his own sorrows as he sought to be for those of others. He indulged in none of the common injustice habitual to discarded lovers.

He recognized the decision of Madame de Tècle as true and final, and was not tempted for a moment to mistake it for one of those equivocal arrangements by which women sometimes deceive themselves, and of which men always take advantage. He realized that the refuge she had sought was inviolable. He neither argued nor protested against her resolve. He submitted to it, and nobly kissed the noble hand which smote him. As to the miracle of courage, chastity, and faith by which Madame de Tècle had transformed and purified her love, he cared not to dwell upon it. This example, which opened to his view a divine soul, naked, so to speak, destroyed his theories. One word which escaped him, while passing to his own house, proved the judgment which he passed upon it, from his own point of view. "Very childish," he muttered, "but sublime!"

On returning home Camors found a letter from General Campvallon, notifying him that his marriage with Mademoiselle d'Estrelles would take place in a few days, and inviting him to be present. The marriage was to be strictly private, with only the family to assist at it.

Camors did not regret this invitation, as it gave him the excuse for some diversion in his thoughts, of which

he felt the need. He was greatly tempted to go away at once to diminish his sufferings, but conquered this weakness. The next evening he passed at the château of M. des Rameures; and though his heart was bleeding, he piqued himself on presenting an unclouded brow and an inscrutable smile to Madame de Tècle. He announced the brief absence he intended, and explained the reason.

"You will present my best wishes to the General," said M. des Rameures. "I hope he may be happy, but I confess I doubt it devilishly."

"I shall bear your good wishes to the General, Monsieur."

"The deuce you will! *Exceptis excipiendis*, I hope," responded the old gentleman, laughing.

As for Madame de Tècle, to tell of all the tender attentions and exquisite delicacies, that a sweet womanly nature knows so well how to apply to heal the wounds it has inflicted—how graciously she glided into her maternal relation with Camors—to tell all this would require a pen wielded by her own soft hands.

Two days later M. de Camors left Reuilly for Paris. The morning after his arrival, he repaired at an early hour to the General's house, a magnificent hôtel in the Rue Vanneau. The marriage contract was to be signed that evening, and the civil and religious ceremonies were to take place next morning.

Camors found the General in a state of extraordinary agitation, pacing up and down the three salons which formed the ground floor of the hotel. The moment he perceived the young man entering—"Ah, it is you!"

he cried, darting a ferocious glance upon him. "By my faith, your arrival is fortunate."

"But, General!"

"Well, what! Why do you not embrace me?"

"Certainly, General!"

"Very well! It is for to-morrow, you know!"

"Yes, General."

"*Sacrebleu!* You are very cool! Have you seen her?"

"Not yet, General. I have just arrived."

"You must go and see her this morning. You owe her this mark of interest; and if you discover anything, you must tell me."

"But what should I discover, General?"

"How do I know? But you understand women much better than I! Does she love me, or does she not love me? You understand, I make no pretensions of turning her head, but still I do not wish to be an object of repulsion to her. Nothing has given me reason to suppose so, but the girl is so reserved, so impenetrable."

"Mademoiselle d'Estrelles is naturally cold," said Camors.

"Yes," responded the General. "Yes, and in some respects I—but really now, should you discover anything, I rely on your communicating it to me. And stop!—when you have seen her, have the kindness to return here, for a few moments—will you? You will greatly oblige me!"

"Certainly, General, I shall do so."

"For my part, I love her like a fool!"

"That is only right, General!"

"Hum—and what of Des Rameures?"

"I think we shall agree, General!"

"Bravo! we shall talk more of this later. Go and see her, my dear child!"

Camors proceeded to the Rue St. Dominique, where Madame de la Roche-Jugan resided.

"Is my aunt in, Joseph?" he inquired of the servant whom he found in the antechamber, very busy in the preparations which the occasion demanded.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, Madame la Comtesse is in and will see you."

"Very well," said Camors; and directed his steps toward his aunt's chamber. But this chamber was no longer hers. This worthy woman had insisted on giving it up to Mademoiselle Charlotte, for whom she manifested, since she had become the betrothed of the seven hundred thousand francs' income of the General, the most humble deference. Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had accepted this change with a disdainful indifference. Camors, who was ignorant of this change, knocked therefore most innocently at the door. Obtaining no answer, he entered without hesitation, lifted the curtain which hung in the doorway, and was immediately arrested by a strange spectacle. At the other extremity of the room, facing him, was a large mirror, before which stood Mademoiselle d'Estrelles. Her back was turned to him.

She was dressed, or rather draped, in a sort of dressing-gown of white cashmere, without sleeves, which left her arms and shoulders bare. Her auburn hair

was unbound and floating, and fell in heavy masses almost to her feet. One hand rested lightly on the toilet-table, the other held together, over her bust, the folds of her dressing-gown.

She was gazing at herself in the glass, and weeping bitterly.

The tears fell drop by drop on her white, fresh bosom, and glittered there like the drops of dew which one sees shining in the morning on the shoulders of the marble nymphs in the gardens.

Then Camors noiselessly dropped the portière and noiselessly retired, taking with him, nevertheless, an eternal souvenir of this stolen visit. He made inquiries; and finally received the embraces of his aunt, who had taken refuge in the chamber of her son, whom she had put in the little chamber formerly occupied by Mademoiselle d'Estrelles. His aunt, after the first greetings, introduced her nephew into the salon, where were displayed all the pomps of the trousseau. Cashmeres, laces, velvets, silks of the finest quality, covered the chairs. On the chimneypiece, the tables, and the consoles, were strewn the jewel-cases.

While Madame de la Roche-Jugan was exhibiting to Camors these magnificent things—of which she failed not to give him the prices—Charlotte, who had been notified of the Count's presence, entered the salon.

Her face was not only serene—it was joyous. "Good morning, cousin!" she said gayly, extending her hand to Camors. "How very kind of you to come! Well, you see how the General spoils me?"

"This is the trousseau of a princess, Mademoiselle!"

"And if you knew, Louis," said Madame de la Roche, "how well all this suits her! Dear child! you would suppose she had been born to a throne. However, you know she is descended from the kings of Spain."

"Dear aunt!" said Mademoiselle, kissing her on the forehead.

"You know, Louis, that I wish her to call me aunt now?" said the Countess, affecting the plaintive tone, which she thought the highest expression of human tenderness.

"Ah, indeed!" said Camors.

"Let us see, little one! Only try on your coronet before your cousin."

"I should like to see it on your brow," said Camors.

"Your slightest wishes are commands," replied Charlotte, in a voice harmonious and grave, but not untouched with irony.

In the midst of the jewelry which encumbered the salon was a full marquise's coronet set in precious stones and pearls. The young girl adjusted it on her head before the glass, and then stood near Camors with majestic composure.

"Look!" she said; and he gazed at her bewildered, for she looked wonderfully beautiful and proud under her coronet.

Suddenly she darted a glance full into the eyes of the young man, and lowering her voice to a tone of inexpressible bitterness, said:

"At least I sell myself dearly, do I not?" Then turning her back to him she laughed, and took off her coronet.

After some further conversation Camors left, saying to himself that this adorable person promised to become very dangerous; but not admitting that he might profit by it.

In conformity with his promise he returned immediately to the General, who continued to pace the three rooms, and cried out as he saw him:

"Eh, well?"

"Very well indeed, General, perfect—everything goes well."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And she said to you——"

"Not much; but she seemed enchanted."

"Seriously, you did not remark anything strange?"

"I remarked she was very lovely!"

"*Parbleu!* and you think she loves me a little?"

"Assuredly, after her way—as much as she can love, for she has naturally a very cold disposition."

"Ah! as to that I console myself. All that I demand is not to be disagreeable to her. Is it not so? Very well, you give me great pleasure. Now, go where you please, my dear boy, until this evening."

"Adieu until this evening, General!"

The signing of the contract was marked by no special incident; only when the notary, with a low, modest voice read the clause by which the General made Mademoiselle d'Estrelles heiress to all his fortune, Camors was amused to remark the superb indifference of Mademoiselle Charlotte, the smiling exasperation of Mes-

dames Bacquière and Van-Cuyp, and the amorous regard which Madame de la Roche-Jugan threw at the same time on Charlotte, her son, and the notary. Then the eye of the Countess rested with a lively interest on the General, and seemed to say that it detected with pleasure in him an unhealthy appearance.

The next morning, on leaving the Church of St. Thomas d'Aquin, the young Marquise only exchanged her wedding-gown for a travelling-costume, and departed with her husband for Campvallon, bathed in the tears of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, whose lacrimal glands were remarkably tender.

Eight days later M. de Camors returned to Reuilly. Paris had revived him, his nerves were strong again.

As a practical man he took a more healthy view of his adventure with Madame de Tècle, and began to congratulate himself on its dénouement. Had things taken a different turn, his future destiny would have been compromised and deranged for him. His political future especially would have been lost, or indefinitely postponed, for his *liaison* with Madame de Tècle would have been discovered some day, and would have forever alienated the friendly feelings of M. des Rameures.

On this point he did not deceive himself. Madame de Tècle, in the first conversation she had with him, confided to him that her uncle seemed much pleased when she laughingly let him see her idea of marrying her daughter some day to M. de Camors.

Camors seized this occasion to remind Madame de Tècle, that while respecting her projects for the future, which she did him the honor to form, he had not pledged

himself to their realization; and that both reason and honor compelled him in this matter to preserve his absolute independence.

She assented to this with her habitual sweetness. From this moment, without ceasing to exhibit toward him every mark of affectionate preference, she never allowed herself the slightest allusion to the dear dream she cherished. Only her tenderness for her daughter seemed to increase, and she devoted herself to the care of her education with redoubled fervor. All this would have touched the heart of M. de Camors, if the heart of M. de Camors had not lost, in its last effort at virtue, the last trace of humanity.

His honor set at rest by his frank avowals to Madame de Tècle, he did not hesitate to profit by the advantages of the situation. He allowed her to serve him as much as she desired, and she desired it passionately. Little by little she had persuaded her uncle that M. de Camors was destined by his character and talents for a great future, and that he would, one day, be an excellent match for Marie; that he was becoming daily more attached to agriculture, which turned toward decentralization, and that he should be attached by firmer bonds to a province which he would honor. While this was going on General Campvallon brought the Marquise to present her to Madame de Tècle; and in a confidential interview with M. des Rameures unmasked his batteries. He was going to Italy to remain some time, but desired first to tender his resignation, and to recommend Camors to his faithful electors.

M. des Rameures, gained over beforehand, prom-

ised his aid; and that aid was equivalent to success. Camors had only to make some personal visits to the more influential electors; but his appearance was as seductive as it was striking, and he was one of those fortunate men who can win a heart or a vote by a smile. Finally, to comply with the requisitions, he established himself for several weeks in the chief town of the department. He made his court to the wife of the prefect, sufficiently to flatter the functionary without disquieting the husband. The prefect informed the minister that the claims of the Comte de Camors were pressed upon the department by an irresistible influence; that the politics of the young Count appeared undecided and a little suspicious, but that the administration, finding it useless to oppose, thought it more politic to sustain him.

The minister, not less politic than the prefect, was of the same opinion.

In consequence of this combination of circumstances, M. de Camors, toward the end of his twenty-eighth year, was elected, at intervals of a few days, member of the Council-General, and deputy to the Corps Législatif.

"You have desired it, my dear Elise," said M. des Rameures, on learning this double result—"you have desired it, and I have supported this young Parisian with all my influence. But I must say, he does not possess my confidence. May we never regret our triumph. May we never have to say with the poet: '*Vota Diis exaudita malignis.*'"[1]

[1] The evil gods have heard our vows.

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW MAN OF THE NEW EMPIRE

IT was now five years since the electors of Reuilly had sent the Comte de Camors to the Corps Législatif, and they had seen no cause to regret their choice. He understood marvellously well their little local interests, and neglected no occasion of forwarding them. Furthermore, if any of his constituents, passing through Paris, presented themselves at his small hotel on the Rue de l'Impératrice—it had been built by an architect named Lescande, as a compliment from the deputy to his old friend—they were received with a winning affability that sent them back to the province with softened hearts. M. de Camors would condescend to inquire whether their wives or their daughters had borne them company; he would place at their disposal tickets for the theatres and passes into the Legislative Chamber; and would show them his pictures and his stables. He also trotted out his horses in the court under their eyes. They found him much improved in personal appearance, and even reported affectionately that his face was fuller and had lost the melancholy cast it used to wear. His manner, once reserved, was now warmer, without any loss

of dignity; his expression, once morose, was now marked by a serenity at once pleasing and grave. His politeness was almost a royal grace; for he showed to women—young or old, rich or poor, virtuous or otherwise—the famous suavity of Louis the Fourteenth.

To his equals, as to his inferiors, his urbanity was perfection; for he cultivated in the depths of his soul—for women, for his inferiors, for his equals, and for his constituents—the same contempt.

He loved, esteemed, and respected only himself; but that self he loved, esteemed, and respected as a god! In fact, he had now realized as completely as possible, in his own person, that almost superhuman ideal he had conceived in the most critical hour of his life.

When he surveyed himself from head to foot in the mental mirror before him, he was content! He was truly that which he wished to be. The programme of his life, as he had laid it down, was faithfully carried out.

By a powerful effort of his mighty will, he succeeded in himself adopting, rather than disdaining in others, all those animal instincts that govern the vulgar. These he believed fetters which bound the feeble, but which the strong could use. He applied himself ceaselessly to the development and perfection of his rare physical and intellectual gifts, only that he might, during the short passage from the cradle to the tomb, extract from them the greatest amount of pleasure. Fully convinced that a thorough knowledge of the world, delicacy of taste and elegance, refinement and the point of honor constituted a sort of moral whole which formed the true

gentleman, he strove to adorn his person with the graver as well as the lighter graces. He was like a conscientious artist, who would leave no smallest detail incomplete. The result of his labor was so satisfactory, that M. de Camors, at the moment we rejoin him, was not perhaps one of the best men in the world, but he was beyond doubt one of the happiest and most amiable. Like all men who have determined to cultivate ability rather than scrupulousness, he saw all things developing to his satisfaction. Confident of his future, he discounted it boldly, and lived as if very opulent. His rapid elevation was explained by his unfailing audacity, by his cool judgment and neat finesse, by his great connection and by his moral independence. He had a hard theory, which he continually expounded with all imaginable grace: "Humanity," he would say, "is composed of speculators!"

Thoroughly imbued with this axiom, he had taken his degree in the grand lodge of financiers. There he at once made himself an authority by his manner and address; and he knew well how to use his name, his political influence, and his reputation for integrity. Employing all these, yet never compromising one of them, he influenced men by their virtues, or their vices, with equal indifference. He was incapable of meanness; he never wilfully entrapped a friend, or even an enemy, into a disastrous speculation; only, if the venture proved unsuccessful, he happened to get out and leave the others in it. But in financial speculations, as in battles, there must be what is called "food for powder;" and if one be too solicitous about this worthless

pabulum, nothing great can be accomplished. So Camors passed as one of the most scrupulous of this goodly company; and his word was as potential in the region of "the rings," as it was in the more elevated sphere of the clubs and of the turf.

Nor was he less esteemed in the Corps Législatif, where he assumed the curious *rôle* of a working member until committees fought for him. It surprised his colleagues to see this elegant young man, with such fine abilities, so modest and so laborious—to see him ready on the dryest subjects and with the most tedious reports. Ponderous laws of local interest neither frightened nor mystified him. He seldom spoke in the public debates, except as a reporter; but in the committee he spoke often, and there his manner was noted for its grave precision, tinged with irony. No one doubted that he was one of the statesmen of the future; but it could be seen he was biding his time.

The exact shade of his politics was entirely unknown. He sat in the "centre left;" polite to every one, but reserved with all. Persuaded, like his father, that the rising generation was preparing, after a time, to pass from theories to revolution—and calculating with pleasure that the development of this periodical catastrophe would probably coincide with his fortieth year, and open to his *blasé* maturity a source of new emotions—he determined to wait and mold his political opinions according to circumstances.

His life, nevertheless, had sufficient of the agreeable to permit him to wait the hour of ambition. Men respected, feared, and envied him. Women adored him.

His presence, of which he was not prodigal, adorned an entertainment: his intrigues could not be gossiped about, being at the same time choice, numerous, and most discreetly conducted.

Passions purely animal never endure long, and his were most ephemeral; but he thought it due to himself to pay the last honors to his victims, and to inter them delicately under the flowers of his friendship. He had in this way made many friends among the Parisian women—a few only of whom detested him. As for the husbands—they were universally fond of him.

To these elegant pleasures he sometimes added a furious debauch, when his imagination was for the moment maddened by champagne. But low company disgusted him, and he shunned it; he was not a man for frequent orgies, and economized his health, his energies, and his strength. His tastes were as thoroughly elevated as could be those of a being who strove to repress his soul. Refined intrigues, luxury in music, paintings, books, and horses—these constituted all the joy of his soul, of his sense, and of his pride. He hovered over the flowers of Parisian elegance; as a bee in the bosom of a rose, he drank in its essence and revelled in its beauty.

It is easy to understand that M. de Camors, relishing this prosperity, attached himself more and more to the moral and religious creed that assured it to him; that he became each day more and more confirmed in the belief that the testament of his father and his own reflection had revealed to him the true evangel of men superior to their species. He was less and less tempted

to violate the rules of the game of life; but among all the useless cards, to hold which might disturb his system, the first he discarded was the thought of marriage. He pitied himself too tenderly at the idea of losing the liberty of which he made such agreeable use; at the idea of taking on himself gratuitously the restraints, the tedium, the ridicule, and even the danger of a household. He shuddered at the bare thought of a community of goods and interest; and of possible paternity.

With such views he was therefore but little disposed to encourage the natural hopes in which Madame de Tècle had entombed her love. He determined so to conduct himself toward her as to leave no ground for the growth of her illusion. He ceased to visit Reuilly, remaining there but two or three weeks in each year, as such time as the session of the Council-General summoned him to the province.

It is true that during these rare visits Camors piqued himself on rendering Madame de Tècle and M. des Rameures all the duties of respectful gratitude. Yet avoiding all allusion to the past, guarding himself scrupulously from confidential converse, and observing a frigid politeness to Mademoiselle Marie, there remained doubt in his mind that, the fickleness of the fair sex aiding him, the young mother of the girl would renounce her chimerical project. His error was great: and it may be here remarked that a hard and scornful scepticism may in this world engender as many false judgments and erroneous calculations as candor or even inexperience can. He believed too much in what

had been written of female fickleness; in deceived lovers, who truly deserved to be such; and in what disappointed men had judged of them.

The truth is, women are generally remarkable for the tenacity of their ideas and for fidelity to their sentiments. Inconstancy of heart is the special attribute of man; but he deems it his privilege as well, and when woman disputes the palm with him on this ground, he cries aloud as if the victim of a robber.

Rest assured this theory is no paradox; as proven by the prodigies of patient devotion—tenacious, inviolable—every day displayed by women of the lower classes, whose natures, if gross, retain their primitive sincerity. Even with women of the world, depraved though they be by the temptations that assail them, nature asserts herself; and it is no rarity to see them devote an entire life to one idea, one thought, or one affection! Their lives do not know the thousand distractions which at once disturb and console men; and any idea that takes hold upon them easily becomes fixed. They dwell upon it in the crowd and in solitude; when they read and while they sew; in their dreams and in their prayers. In it they live—for it they die.

It was thus that Madame de Tècle had dwelt year after year on the project of this alliance with unalterable fervor, and had blended the two pure affections that shared her heart in this union of her daughter with Camors, and in thus securing the happiness of both. Ever since she had conceived this desire—which could only have had its birth in a soul as pure as it was tender—the education of her child had become the sweet

romance of her life. She dreamed of it always, and of nothing else.

Without knowing or even suspecting the evil traits lurking in the character of Camors, she still understood that, like the great majority of the young men of his day, the young Count was not overburdened with principle. But she held that one of the privileges of woman, in our social system, was the elevation of their husbands by connection with a pure soul, by family affections, and by the sweet religion of the heart. Seeking, therefore, by making her daughter an amiable and lovable woman, to prepare her for the high mission for which she was destined, she omitted nothing which could improve her. What success rewarded her care the sequel of this narrative will show. It will suffice, for the present, to inform the reader that Mademoiselle de Tècle was a young girl of pleasing countenance, whose short neck was placed on shoulders a little too high. She was not beautiful, but extremely pretty, well educated, and much more vivacious than her mother.

Mademoiselle Marie was so quick-witted that her mother often suspected she knew the secret which concerned herself. Sometimes she talked too much of M. de Camors; sometimes she talked too little, and assumed a mysterious air when others spoke of him.

Madame de Tècle was a little disturbed by these eccentricities. The conduct of M. de Camors, and his more than reserved bearing, annoyed her occasionally; but when we love any one we are likely to interpret favorably all that he does, or all that he omits to do. Madame de Tècle readily attributed the equivocal con-

duct of the Count to the inspiration of a chivalric loyalty. As she believed she knew him thoroughly, she thought he wished to avoid committing himself, or awakening public observation, before he had made up his mind.

He acted thus to avoid disturbing the repose of both mother and daughter. Perhaps also the large fortune which seemed destined for Mademoiselle de Tècle might add to his scruples by rousing his pride.

His not marrying was in itself a good augury, and his little *fiancée* was reaching a marriageable age. She therefore did not despair that some day M. de Camors would throw himself at her feet, and say, "Give her to me!"

If God did not intend that this delicious page should ever be written in the book of her destiny, and she was forced to marry her daughter to another, the poor woman consoled herself with the thought that all the cares she lavished upon her would not be lost, and that her dear child would thus be rendered better and happier.

The long months which intervened between the annual apparition of Camors at Reuilly, filled up by Madame de Tècle with a single idea and by the sweet monotony of a regular life, passed more rapidly than the Count could have imagined. His own life, so active and so occupied, placed ages and abysses between each of his periodical voyages. But Madame de Tècle, after five years, was always only a day removed from the cherished and fatal night on which her dream had begun. Since that period there had been no break

in her thoughts, no void in her heart, no wrinkle on her forehead. Her dream continued young, like herself. But in spite of the peaceful and rapid succession of her days, it was not without anxiety that she saw the approach of the season which always heralded the return of Camors.

As her daughter matured, she preoccupied herself with the impression she would make on the mind of the Count, and felt more sensibly the solemnity of the matter.

Mademoiselle Marie, as we have already stated, was a cunning little puss, and had not failed to perceive that her tender mother chose habitually the season of the convocation of the Councils-General to try a new style of hair-dressing for her. The same year on which we have resumed our recital there passed, on one occasion, a little scene which rather annoyed Madame de Tècle. She was trying a new coiffure on Mademoiselle Marie, whose hair was very pretty and very black; some stray and rebellious portions had frustrated her mother's efforts.

There was one lock in particular, which in spite of all combing and brushing would break away from the rest, and fall in careless curls. Madame de Tècle finally, by the aid of some ribbons, fastened down the rebellious curl:

"Now I think it will do," she said sighing, and stepping back to admire the effect of her work.

"Don't believe it," said Marie, who was laughing and mocking. "I do not think so. I see exactly what will happen: the bell rings—I run out—my net gives

way—Monsieur de Camors walks in—my mother is annoyed—tableau!"

"I should like to know what Monsieur de Camors has to do with it?" said Madame de Tècle.

Her daughter threw her arms around her neck—"Nothing!" she said.

Another time Madame de Tècle detected her speaking of M. de Camors in a tone of bitter irony. He was "the great man"—"the mysterious personage"—"the star of the neighborhood"—"the phœnix of guests in their woods"—or simply "the Prince!"

Such symptoms were of so serious a nature as not to escape Madame de Tècle.

In presence of "the Prince," it is true, the young girl lost her gayety; but this was another cross. Her mother found her cold, awkward, and silent—brief, and slightly caustic in her replies. She feared M. de Camors would misjudge her from such appearances.

But Camors formed no judgment, good or bad; Mademoiselle de Tècle was for him only an insignificant little girl, whom he never thought of for a moment in the year.

There was, however, at this time in society a person who did interest him very much, and the more because against his will. This was the Marquise de Campvallon, *née* de Luc d'Estrelles.

The General, after making the tour of Europe with his young wife, had taken possession of his hotel in the Rue Vanneau, where he lived in great splendor. They resided at Paris during the winter and spring, but in July returned to their château at Campvallon, where

they entertained in great state until the autumn. The General invited Madame de Tècle and her daughter, every year, to pass some weeks at Campvallon, rightly judging that he could not give his young wife better companions. Madame de Tècle accepted these invitations cheerfully, because it gave her an opportunity of seeing the *élite* of the Parisian world, from whom the whims of her uncle had always isolated her. For her own part, she did not much enjoy it; but her daughter, by moving in the midst of such fashion and elegance could thus efface some provincialisms of toilet or of language; perfect her taste in the delicate and fleeting changes of the prevailing modes, and acquire some additional graces. The young Marquise, who reigned and scintillated like a bright star in these high regions of social life, lent herself to the designs of her neighbor. She seemed to take a kind of maternal interest in Mademoiselle de Tècle, and frequently added her advice to her example. She assisted at her toilet and gave the final touches with her own dainty hands; and the young girl, in return, loved, admired, and confided in her.

Camors also enjoyed the hospitalities of the General once every season, but was not his guest as often as he wished. He seldom remained at Campvallon longer than a week. Since the return of the Marquise to France he had resumed the relations of a kinsman and friend with her husband and herself; but, while trying to adopt the most natural manner, he treated them both with a certain reserve, which astonished the General. It will not surprise the reader, who recollects the secret and powerful reasons which justified this circumspection.

For Camors, in renouncing the greater part of the restraints which control and bind men in their relations with one another, had religiously intended to preserve one—the sentiment of honor. Many times, in the course of this life, he had felt himself embarrassed to limit and fix with certainty the boundaries of the only moral law he wished to respect.

It is easy to know exactly what is in the Bible;—it is not easy to know exactly what the code of honor commands.

CHAPTER XII

CIRCE

BUT there exists, nevertheless, in this code one article, as to which M. de Camors could not deceive himself, and it was that which forbade his attempting to assail the honor of the General under penalty of being in his own eyes, as a gentleman, a felon and foresworn. He had accepted from this old man confidence, affection, services, benefits—everything which could bind one man inviolably to another man—if there be beneath the heavens anything called honor. He felt this profoundly.

His conduct toward Madame de Campvallon had been irreproachable; and all the more so, because the only woman he was interdicted from loving was the only woman in Paris, or in the universe, who naturally pleased him most. He entertained for her, at once, the interest which attaches to forbidden fruit, to the attraction of strange beauty, and to the mystery of an impenetrable sphinx. She was, at this time, more goddess-like than ever. The immense fortune of her husband, and the adulation which it brought her, had placed her on a golden car. On this she seated herself with a gracious and native majesty, as if in her proper place.

The luxury of her toilet, of her jewels, of her house and of her equipages, was of regal magnificence. She blended the taste of an artist with that of a patrician. Her person appeared really to be made divine by the rays of this splendor. Large, blonde, graceful, the eyes blue and unfathomable, the forehead grave, the mouth pure and proud it was impossible to see her enter a salon with her light, gliding step, or to see her reclining in her carriage, her hands folded serenely, without dreaming of the young immortals whose love brought death.

She had even those traits of physiognomy, stern and wild, which the antique sculptors doubtless had surprised in supernatural visitations, and which they have stamped on the eyes and the lips of their marble gods. Her arms and shoulders, perfect in form, seemed models, in the midst of the rosy and virgin snow which covered the neighboring mountains. She was truly superb and bewitching. The Parisian world respected as much as it admired her, for she played her difficult part of young bride to an old man so perfectly as to avoid scandal. Without any pretence of extraordinary devotion, she knew how to join to her worldly pomps the exercise of charity, and all the other practices of an elegant piety. Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who watched her closely, as one watching a prey, testified, herself, in her favor; and judged her more and more worthy of her son. And Camors, who observed her, in spite of himself, with an eager curiosity, was finally induced to believe, as did his aunt and all the world, that she conscientiously performed her difficult duties,

and that she found in the *éclat* of her life and the gratification of her pride a sufficient compensation for the sacrifice of her youth, her heart, and her beauty; but certain souvenirs of the past, joined to certain peculiarities, which he fancied he remarked in the Marquise, induced him to distrust.

There were times, when recalling all that he had once witnessed—the abysses and the flame at the bottom of that heart—he was tempted to suspect the existence of many storms under all this calm exterior, and perhaps some wickedness. It is true she never was with him precisely as she was before the world. The character of their relations was marked by a peculiar tone. It was precisely that tone of covert irony adopted by two persons who desired neither to remember nor to forget. This tone, softened in the language of Camors by his worldly tact and his respect, was much more pointed, and had much more of bitterness on the side of the young woman.

He even fancied, at times, that he discovered a shade of coquetry under this treatment; and this provocation, vague as it was, coming from this beautiful, cold, and inscrutable creature, seemed to him a game fearfully mysterious, that at once attracted and disturbed him.

This was the state of things when the Count came, according to custom, to pass the first days of September at the château of Campvallon, and met there Madame de Tècle and her daughter. The visit was a painful one, this year, for Madame de Tècle. Her confidence deserted her, and serious concern took its place. She

had, it is true, fixed in her mind, as the last point of her hopes, the moment when her daughter should have reached twenty years of age; and Marie was only eighteen.

But she already had had several offers, and several times public rumor had already declared her to be betrothed.

Now, Camors could not have been ignorant of the rumors circulating in the neighborhood, and yet he did not speak. His countenance did not change. He was coldly affectionate to Madame de Tècle, but toward Marie, in spite of her beautiful blue eyes, like her mother's, and her curly hair, he preserved a frozen indifference. For Camors had other anxieties, of which Madame de Tècle knew nothing. The manner of Madame Campvallon toward him had assumed a more marked character of aggressive raillery. A defensive attitude is never agreeable to a man, and Camors felt it more disagreeable than most men—being so little accustomed to it.

He resolved promptly to shorten his visit at Campvallon.

On the eve of his departure, about five o'clock in the afternoon, he was standing at his window, looking beyond the trees at the great black clouds sailing over the valley, when he heard the sound of a voice that had power to move him deeply—"Monsieur de Camors!" He saw the Marquise standing under his window.

"Will you walk with me?" she added.

He bowed and descended immediately. At the moment he reached her——

"It is suffocating," she said. "I wish to walk round the park and will take you with me."

He muttered a few polite phrases, and they began walking, side by side, through the alleys of the park.

She moved at a rapid pace, with her majestic motion, her body swaying, her head erect. One would have looked for a page behind her, but she had none, and her long blue robe—she rarely wore short skirts—trailed on the sand and over the dry leaves with the soft rustle of silk.

"I have disturbed you, probably?" she said, after a moment's pause. "What were you dreaming of up there?"

"Nothing—only watching the coming storm."

"Are you becoming poetical, cousin?"

"There is no necessity for becoming, for I already am infinitely so!"

"I do not think so. Shall you leave to-morrow?"

"I shall."

"Why so soon?"

"I have business elsewhere."

"Very well. But Vau—Vautrot—is he not there?"

Vautrot was the secretary of M. de Camors.

"Vautrot can not do everything," he replied.

"By the way, I do not like your Vautrot."

"Nor I. But he was recommended to me by my old friend, Madame d'Oilly, as a freethinker, and at the same time by my aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan, as a religious man!"

"How amusing!"

"Nevertheless," said Camors, "he is intelligent and witty, and writes a fine hand."

"And you?"

"How? What of me?"

"Do you also write a good hand?"

"I will show you, whenever you wish!"

"Ah! and will you write to me?"

It is difficult to imagine the tone of supreme indifference and haughty persiflage with which the Marquise sustained this dialogue, without once slackening her pace, or glancing at her companion, or changing the proud and erect pose of her head.

"I will write you either prose or verse, as you wish," said Camors.

"Ah! you know how to compose verses?"

"When I am inspired!"

"And when are you inspired?"

"Usually in the morning."

"And we are now in the evening. That is not complimentary to me."

"But you, Madame, had no desire to inspire me, I think."

"Why not, then? I should be happy and proud to do so. Do you know what I should like to put there?" and she stopped suddenly before a rustic bridge, which spanned a murmuring rivulet.

"I do not know!"

"You can not even guess? I should like to put an artificial rock there."

"Why not a natural one? In your place I should put a natural one!"

"That is an idea," said the Marquise, and walking on she crossed the bridge.

"But it really thunders. I like to hear thunder in the country. Do you?"

"I prefer to hear it thunder at Paris."

"Why?"

"Because then I should not hear it."

"You have no imagination."

"I have; but I smother it."

"Possibly. I have suspected you of hiding your merits, and particularly from me."

"Why should I conceal my merits from you?"

"'Why should I conceal my merits' is good!" said the Marquise, ironically. "Why? Out of charity, Monsieur, not to dazzle me, and in regard for my repose! You are really too good, I assure you. Here comes the rain."

Large drops of rain began to fall on the dry leaves, and on the yellow sand of the alley. The day was dying, and the sudden shower bent the boughs of the trees.

"We must return," said the young woman; "this begins to get serious."

She took, in haste, the path which led to the château; but after a few steps a bright flash broke over her head, the noise of the thunder resounded, and a deluge of rain fell upon the fields.

There was fortunately, near by, a shelter in which the Marquise and her companion could take refuge. It was a ruin, preserved as an ornament to the park, which had formerly been the chapel of the ancient

château. It was almost as large as the village chapel —the broken walls half concealed under a thick mantle of ivy. Its branches had pushed through the roof and mingled with the boughs of the old trees which surrounded and shaded it. The timbers had disappeared. The extremity of the choir, and the spot formerly occupied by the altar, were alone covered by the remains of the roof. Wheelbarrows, rakes, spades, and other garden tools were piled there.

The Marquise had to take refuge in the midst of this rubbish, in the narrow space, and her companion followed her.

The storm, in the mean time, increased in violence. The rain fell in torrents through the old walls, inundating the soil in the ancient nave. The lightning flashed incessantly. Every now and then fragments of earth and stone detached themselves from the roof, and fell into the choir.

"I find this magnificent!" said Madame de Campvallon.

"I also," said Camors, raising his eyes to the crumbling roof which half protected them; "but I do not know whether we are safe here!"

"If you fear, you would better go!" said the Marquise.

"I fear for you."

"You are too good, I assure you."

She took off her cap and brushed it with her glove, to remove the drops of rain which had fallen upon it. After a slight pause, she suddenly raised her uncovered head and cast on Camors one of those

searching looks which prepares a man for an important question.

"Cousin!" she said, "if you were sure that one of these flashes of lightning would kill you in a quarter of an hour, what would you do?"

"Why, cousin, naturally I should take a last farewell of you."

"How?"

He regarded her steadily, in his turn. "Do you know," he said, "there are moments when I am tempted to think you a devil?"

"Truly! Well, there are times when I am tempted to think so myself—for example, at this moment. Do you know what I should wish? I wish I could control the lightning, and in two seconds you would cease to exist."

"For what reason?"

"Because I recollect there was a man to whom I offered myself, and who refused me, and that this man still lives. And this displeases me a little—a great deal—passionately."

"Are you serious, Madame?" replied Camors.

She laughed.

"I hope you did not think so. I am not so wicked. It was a joke—and in bad taste, I admit. But seriously now, cousin, what is your opinion of me? What kind of woman has time made me?"

"I swear to you I am entirely ignorant."

"Admitting I had become, as you did me the honor to suppose, a diabolical person, do you think you had nothing to do with it? Tell me! Do you not believe

that there is in the life of a woman a decisive hour, when the evil seed which is cast upon her soul may produce a terrible harvest? Do you not believe this? Answer me! And should I not be excusable if I entertained toward you the sentiment of an exterminating angel; and have I not some merit in being what I am —a good woman, who loves you well—with a little rancor, but not much—and who wishes you all sorts of prosperity in this world and the next? Do not answer me: it might embarrass you, and it would be useless."

She left her shelter, and turned her face toward the lowering sky to see whether the storm was over.

"It has stopped raining," she said, "let us go."

She then perceived that the lower part of the nave had been transformed into a lake of mud and water. She stopped at its brink, and uttered a little cry:

"What shall I do?" she said, looking at her light shoes. Then, turning toward Camors, she added, laughing:

"Monsieur, will you get me a boat?"

Camors, himself, recoiled from stepping into the greasy mud and stagnant water which filled the whole space of the nave.

"If you will wait a little," he said, "I shall find you some boots or sabots, no matter what."

"It will be much easier," she said abruptly, "for you to carry me to the door;" and without waiting for the young man's reply, she tucked up her skirts carefully, and when she had finished, she said, "Carry me!"

He looked at her with astonishment, and thought for

a moment she was jesting; but soon saw she was perfectly serious.

"Of what are you afraid?" she asked.

"I am not at all afraid," he answered.

"Is it that you are not strong enough?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I should think I was."

He took her in his arms, as in a cradle, while she held up her skirts with both hands. He then descended the steps and moved toward the door with his strange burden. He was obliged to be very careful not to slip on the wet earth, and this absorbed him during the first few steps; but when he found his footing more sure, he felt a natural curiosity to observe the countenance of the Marquise.

The uncovered head of the young woman rested a little on the arm with which he held her. Her lips were slightly parted with a half-wicked smile that showed her fine white teeth; the same expression of ungovernable malice burned in her dark eyes, which she riveted for some seconds on those of Camors with persistent penetration—then suddenly veiled them under the fringe of her dark lashes. This glance sent a thrill like lightning to his very marrow.

"Do you wish to drive me mad?" he murmured.

"Who knows?" she replied.

The same moment she disengaged herself from his arms, and placing her foot on the ground again, left the ruin.

They reached the château without exchanging a word. Just before entering the house the young Marquise turned toward Camors and said to him:

"Be sure that at heart I am very good, really."

Notwithstanding this assertion, Camors was yet more determined to leave the next morning, as he had previously decided. He carried away the most painful impression of the scene of that evening.

She had wounded his pride, inflamed his hopeless passion, and disquieted his honor.

"What is this woman, and what does she want of me? Is it love or vengeance that inspires her with this fiendish coquetry?" he asked himself. Whatever it was, Camors was not such a novice in similar adventures as not to perceive clearly the yawning abyss under the broken ice. He resolved sincerely to close it again between them, and forever. The best way to succeed in this, avowedly, was to cease all intercourse with the Marquise. But how could such conduct be explained to the General, without awakening his suspicion and lowering his wife in his esteem? That plan was impossible. He armed himself with all his courage, and resigned himself to endure with resolute soul all the trials which the love, real or pretended, of the Marquise reserved for him.

He had at this time a singular idea. He was a member of several of the most aristocratic clubs. He organized a chosen group of men from the *élite* of his companions, and formed with them a secret association, of which the object was to fix and maintain among its members the principles and points of honor in their strictest form. This society, which had only been vaguely spoken of in public under the name of "*Société des Raffinés*," and also as "The Templars"—

which latter was its true name—had nothing in common with "The Devourers," illustrated by Balzac. It had nothing in it of a romantic or dramatic character. Those who composed this club did not, in any way, defy ordinary morals, nor set themselves above the laws of their country. They did not bind themselves by any vows of mutual aid in extremity. They bound themselves simply by their word of honor to observe, in their reciprocal relations, the rules of purest honor.

These rules were specified in their code. The text it is difficult to give; but it was based entirely on the point of honor, and regulated the affairs of the club, such as the card-table, the turf, duelling, and gallantry. For example, any member was disqualified from belonging to this association who either insulted or interfered with the wife or relative of one of his colleagues. The only penalty was exclusion: but the consequences of this exclusion were grave; for all the members ceased thereafter to associate with, recognize, or even bow to the offender. The Templars found in this secret society many advantages. It was a great security in their intercourse with one another, and in the different circumstances of daily life, where they met continually either at the opera, in salons, or on the turf.

Camors was an exception among his companions and rivals in Parisian life by the systematic decision of his doctrine. It was not so much an embodiment of absolute scepticism and practical materialism; but the want of a moral law is so natural to man, and obedience to higher laws so sweet to him, that the chosen adepts to whom the project of Camors was submitted accepted

it with enthusiasm. They were happy in being able to substitute a sort of positive and formal religion for restraints so limited as their own confused and floating notions of honor. For Camors himself, as is easily understood, it was a new barrier which he wished to erect between himself and the passion which fascinated him. He attached himself to this with redoubled force, as the only moral bond yet left him. He completed his work by making the General accept the title of President of the Association. The General, to whom Honor was a sort of mysterious but real goddess, was delighted to preside over the worship of his idol. He felt flattered by his young friend's selection, and esteemed him the more.

It was the middle of winter. The Marquise Campvallon had resumed for some time her usual course of life, which was at the same time strict but elegant. Punctual at church every morning, at the Bois and at charity bazaars during the day, at the opera or the theatres in the evening, she had received M. de Camors without the shadow of apparent emotion. She even treated him more simply and more naturally than ever, with no recurrence to the past, no allusion to the scene in the park during the storm; as if she had, on that day, disclosed everything that had lain hidden in her heart. This conduct so much resembled indifference, that Camors should have been delighted; but he was not—on the contrary he was annoyed by it. A cruel but powerful interest, already too dear to his *blasé* soul, was disappearing thus from his life. He was inclined to believe that Madame de Campvallon

possessed a much less complicated character than he had fancied; and that little by little absorbed in daily trifles, she had become in reality what she pretended to be —a good woman, inoffensive, and contented with her lot.

He was one evening in his orchestra-stall at the opera. They were singing *The Huguenots*. The Marquise occupied her box between the columns. The numerous acquaintances Camors met in the passages during the first *entr'acte* prevented his going as soon as usual to pay his respects to his cousin. At last, after the fourth act, he went to visit her in her box, where he found her alone, the General having descended to the parterre for a few moments. He was astonished, on entering, to find traces of tears on the young woman's cheeks. Her eyes were even moist. She seemed displeased at being surprised in the very act of sentimentality.

"Music always excites my nerves," she said.

"Indeed!" said Camors. "You, who always reproach me with hiding my merits, why do you hide yours? If you are still capable of weeping, so much the better."

"No! I claim no merit for that. Oh, heavens! If you only knew! It is quite the contrary."

"What a mystery you are!"

"Are you very curious to fathom this mystery? Only that? Very well—be happy! It is time to put an end to this."

She drew her chair from the front of the box out of public view, and, turning toward Camors, continued: "You wish to know what I am, what I feel, and what

I think; or rather, you wish to know simply whether I dream of love? Very well, I dream only of that! Have I lovers, or have I not? I have none, and never shall have, but that will not be because of my virtue. I believe in nothing, except my own self-esteem and my contempt of others. The little intrigues, the petty passions, which I see in the world, make me indignant to the bottom of my soul. It seems to me that women who give themselves for so little must be base creatures. As for myself, I remember having said to you one day—it is a million years since then!—that my person is sacred to me; and to commit a sacrilege I should wish, like the vestals of Rome, a love as great as my crime, and as terrible as death. I wept just now during that magnificent fourth act. It was not because I listened to the most marvellous music ever heard on this earth; it was because I admire and envy passionately the superb and profound love of that time. And it is ever thus—when I read the history of the glorious sixteenth century, I am in ecstacies. How well those people knew how to love and how to die! One night of love—then death. That is delightful. Now, cousin, you must leave me. We are observed. They will believe we love each other, and as we have not that pleasure, it is useless to incur the penalties. Since I am still in the midst of the court of Charles Tenth, I pity you, with your black coat and round hat. Good-night."

"I thank you very much," replied Camors, taking the hand she extended to him coldly, and left the box. He met M. de Campvallon in the passage.

"*Parbleu!* my dear friend," said the General, seizing him by the arm. "I must communicate to you an idea which has been in my brain all the evening."

"What idea, General?"

"Well, there are here this evening a number of charming young girls. This set me to thinking of you, and I even said to my wife that we must marry you to one of these young women!"

"Oh, General!"

"Well, why not?"

"That is a very serious thing—if one makes a mistake in his choice—that is everything."

"Bah! it is not so difficult a thing. Take a wife like mine, who has a great deal of religion, not much imagination, and no fancies. That is the whole secret. I tell you this in confidence, my dear fellow!"

"Well, General, I will think of it."

"Do think of it," said the General, in a serious tone; and went to join his young wife, whom he understood so well.

As to her, she thoroughly understood herself, and analyzed her own character with surprising truth.

Madame de Campvallon was just as little what her manner indicated as was M. de Camors on his side. Both were altogether exceptional in French society. Equally endowed by nature with energetic souls and enlightened minds, both carried innate depravity to a high degree. The artificial atmosphere of high Parisian civilization destroys in women the sentiment and the taste for duty, and leaves them nothing but the

sentiment and the taste for pleasure. They lose in the midst of this enchanted and false life, like theatrical fairyland, the true idea of life in general, and Christian life in particular. And we can confidently affirm that all those who do not make for themselves, apart from the crowd, a kind of Thebaid—and there are such—are pagans. They are pagans, because the pleasures of the senses and of the mind alone interest them, and they have not once, during the year, an impression of the moral law, unless the sentiment, which some of them detest, recalls it to them. They are pagans, like the beautiful, worldly Catholics of the fifteenth century—loving luxury, rich stuffs, precious furniture, literature, art, themselves, and love. They were charming pagans, like Marie Stuart, and capable, like her, of remaining true Catholics even under the axe.

We are speaking, let it be understood, of the best of the *élite*—of those that read, and of those that dream. As to the rest, those who participate in the Parisian life on its lighter side, in its childish whirl, and the trifling follies it entails, who make rendezvous, waste their time, who dress and are busy day and night doing nothing, who dance frantically in the rays of the Parisian sun, without thought, without passion, without virtue, and even without vice—we must own it is impossible to imagine anything more contemptible.

The Marquise de Campvallon was then—as she truly said to the man she resembled—a great pagan; and, as she also said to herself in one of her serious moments when a woman's destiny is decided by the

influence of those they love, Camors had sown in her heart a seed which had marvellously fructified.

Camors dreamed little of reproaching himself for it, but struck with all the harmony that surrounded the Marquise, he regretted more bitterly than ever the fatality which separated them.

He felt, however, more sure of himself, since he had bound himself by the strictest obligations of honor. He abandoned himself from this moment with less scruple to the emotions, and to the danger against which he believed himself invincibly protected. He did not fear to seek often the society of his beautiful cousin, and even contracted the habit of repairing to her house two or three times a week, after leaving the Chamber of Deputies. Whenever he found her alone, their conversation invariably assumed a tone of irony and of raillery, in which both excelled. He had not forgotten her reckless confidences at the opera, and recalled it to her, asking her whether she had yet discovered that hero of love for whom she was looking, who should be, according to her ideas, a villain like Bothwell, or a musician like Rizzio.

"There are," she replied, "villains who are also musicians; but that is imagination. Sing me, then, something apropos."

It was near the close of winter. The Marquise gave a ball. Her *fêtes* were justly renowned for their magnificence and good taste. She did the honors with the grace of a queen. This evening she wore a very simple costume, as was becoming in the courteous hostess. It was a gown of dark velvet, with a

train; her arms were bare, without jewels; a necklace of large pearls lay on her rose-tinted bosom, and the heraldic coronet sparkled on her fair hair.

Camors caught her eye as he entered, as if she were watching for him. He had seen her the previous evening, and they had had a more lively skirmish than usual. He was struck by her brilliancy—her beauty heightened, without doubt, by the secret ardor of the quarrel, as if illuminated by an interior flame, with all the clear, soft splendor of a transparent alabaster vase.

When he advanced to join her and salute her, yielding, against his will, to an involuntary movement of passionate admiration, he said:

"You are truly beautiful this evening. Enough so to make one commit a crime."

She looked fixedly in his eyes, and replied:

"I should like to see that," and then left him, with superb nonchalance.

The General approached, and tapping the Count on the shoulder, said:

"Camors! you do not dance, as usual. Let us play a game of piquet."

"Willingly, General;" and traversing two or three salons they reached the private boudoir of the Marquise. It was a small oval room, very lofty, hung with thick red silk tapestry, covered with black and white flowers. As the doors were removed, two heavy curtains isolated the room completely from the neighboring gallery. It was there that the General usually played cards and slept during his *fêtes*. A

small card-table was placed before a divan. Except this addition, the boudoir preserved its every-day aspect. Woman's work, half finished, books, journals, and reviews were strewn upon the furniture. They played two or three games, which the General won, as Camors was very abstracted.

"I reproach myself, young man," said the former, "in having kept you so long away from the ladies. I give you back your liberty—I shall cast my eye on the journals."

"There is nothing new in them, I think," said Camors, rising. He took up a newspaper himself, and placing his back against the mantelpiece, warmed his feet, one after the other. The General threw himself on the divan, ran his eye over the *Moniteur de l'Armée*, approving of some military promotions, and criticising others; and, little by little, he fell into a doze, his head resting on his chest.

But Camors was not reading. He listened vaguely to the music of the orchestra, and fell into a reverie. Through these harmonies, through the murmurs and warm perfume of the ball, he followed, in thought, all the evolutions of her who was mistress and queen of all. He saw her proud and supple step—he heard her grave and musical voice—he felt her breath.

This young man had exhausted everything. Love and pleasure had no longer for him secrets or temptations; but his imagination, cold and *blasé*, had arisen all inflamed before this beautiful, living, palpitating statue. She was really for him more than a woman —more than a mortal. The antique fables of amorous

goddesses and drunken Bacchantes—the superhuman voluptuousness unknown in terrestrial pleasures—were in reach of his hand, separated from him only by the shadow of this sleeping old man. But a shadow was ever between them—it was honor.

His eyes, as if lost in thought, were fixed straight before him on the curtain opposite the chimney. Suddenly this curtain was noiselessly raised, and the young Marquise appeared, her brow surmounted by her coronet. She threw a rapid glance over the boudoir, and after a moment's pause, let the curtain fall gently, and advanced directly toward Camors, who stood dazzled and immovable. She took both his hands, without speaking, looked at his steadily—throwing a rapid glance at her husband, who still slept—and, standing on tiptoe, offered her lips to the young man.

Bewildered, and forgetting all else, he bent, and imprinted a kiss on her lips.

At that very moment, the General made a sudden movement and woke up; but the same instant the Marquise was standing before him, her hands resting on the card-table; and smiling upon him, she said, "Good-morning, my General!"

The General murmured a few words of apology, but she laughingly pushed him back on his divan.

"Continue your nap," she said; "I have come in search of my cousin, for the last cotillon." The General obeyed.

She passed out by the gallery. The young man, pale as a spectre, followed her.

Passing under the curtain, she turned toward him with a wild light burning in her eyes. Then, before she was lost in the throng, she whispered, in a low, thrilling voice:

"*There is the crime!*"

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

CAMORS did not attempt to rejoin the Marquise, and it seemed to him that she also avoided him. A quarter of an hour later, he left the Hôtel Campvallon.

He returned immediately home. A lamp was burning in his chamber. When he saw himself in the mirror, his own face terrified him. This exciting scene had shaken his nerves.

He could no longer control himself. His pupil had become his master. The fact itself did not surprise him. Woman is more exalted than man in morality. There is no virtue, no devotion, no heroism in which she does not surpass him; but once impelled to the verge of the abyss, she falls faster and lower than man. This is attributable to two causes: she has more passion, and she has no honor. For honor is a reality and must not be underrated. It is a noble, delicate, and salutary quality. It elevates manly attributes; in fact, it constitutes the modesty of man. It is sometimes a force, and always a grace. But to think that honor is all-sufficient; that in the face of great interests, great passions, great trials in life, it is a support and an in-

fallible defence; that it can enforce the precepts which come from God—in fact that it can replace God—this is a terrible mistake. It exposes one in a fatal moment to the loss of one's self-esteem, and to fall suddenly and forever into that dismal ocean of bitterness where Camors at that instant was struggling in despair, like a drowning man in the darkness of midnight.

He abandoned himself, on this evil night, to a final conflict full of agony; and he was beaten.

The next evening at six o'clock he was at the house of the Marquise. He found her in her boudoir, surrounded by all her regal luxury. She was half buried in a fauteuil in the chimney-corner, looking a little pale and fatigued. She received him with her usual coldness and self-possession.

"Good-day," she said. "How are you?"

"Not very well," replied Camors.

"What is the matter?"

"I fancy that you know."

She opened her large eyes wide with surprise, but did not reply.

"I entreat you, Madame," continued Camors, smiling—"no more music, the curtain is raised, and the drama has begun."

"Ah! we shall see."

"Do you love me?" he continued; "or were you simply acting, to try me, last night? Can you, or will you, tell me?"

"I certainly could, but I do not wish to do so."

"I had thought you more frank."

"I have my hours."

"Well, then," said Camors, "if your hours of frankness have passed, mine have begun."

"That would be compensation," she replied.

"And I will prove it to you," continued Camors.

"I shall make a *fête* of it," said the Marquise, throwing herself back on the sofa, as if to make herself comfortable in order to enjoy an agreeable conversation.

"I love you, Madame; and as you wish to be loved. I love you devotedly and unto death—enough to kill myself, or you!"

"That is well," said the Marquise, softly.

"But," he continued in a hoarse and constrained tone, "in loving you, in telling you of it, in trying to make you share my love, I violate basely the obligations of honor of which you know, and others of which you know not. It is a crime, as you have said. I do not try to extenuate my offence. I see it, I judge it, and I accept it. I break the last moral tie that is left me; I leave the ranks of men of honor, and I leave also the ranks of humanity. I have nothing human left except my love, nothing sacred but you; but my crime elevates itself by its magnitude. Well, I interpret it thus: I imagine two beings, equally free and strong, loving and valuing each other beyond all else, having no affection, no loyalty, no devotion, no honor, except toward each other—but possessing all for each other in a supreme degree.

"I give and consecrate absolutely to you, my person, all that I can be, or may become, on condition of an equal return, still preserving the same social conventionalities, without which we should both be miserable.

"Secretly united, and secretly isolated; though in the midst of the human herd, governing and despising it; uniting our gifts, our faculties, and our powers, our two Parisian royalties—yours, which can not be greater, and mine, which shall become greater if you love me—and living thus, one for the other, until death. You have dreamed, you told me, of strange and almost sacrilegious love. Here it is; only before accepting it, reflect well, for I assure you it is a serious thing. My love for you is boundless. I love you enough to disdain and trample under foot that which the meanest human being still respects. I love you enough to find in you alone, in your single esteem, and in your sole tenderness, in the pride and madness of being yours, oblivion and consolation for friendship outraged, faith betrayed, and honor lost. But, Madame, this is a sentiment which you will do well not to trifle with. You should thoroughly understand this. If you desire my love, if you consent to this alliance, opposed to all human laws, but grand and singular also, deign to tell me so, and I shall fall at your feet. If you do not wish it, if it terrifies you, if you are not prepared for the double obligation it involves, tell me so, and fear not a word of reproach. Whatever it might cost me—I would ruin my life, I would leave you forever, and that which passed yesterday should be eternally forgotten."

He ceased, and remained with his eyes fixed on the young woman with a burning anxiety. As he went on speaking her air became more grave; she listened to him, her head a little inclined toward him in an attitude of overpowering interest, throwing upon him at inter-

vals a glance full of gloomy fire. A slight but rapid palpitation of the bosom, a scarcely perceptible quivering of the nostrils, alone betrayed the storm raging within her.

"This," she said, after a moment's silence, "becomes really interesting; but you do not intend to leave this evening, I suppose?"

"No," said Camors.

"Very well," she replied, inclining her head in sign of dismissal, without offering her hand; "we shall see each other again."

"But when?"

"At an early day."

He thought she required time for reflection, a little terrified doubtless by the monster she had evoked; he saluted her gravely and departed.

The next day, and on the two succeeding days, he vainly presented himself at her door.

The Marquise was either dining out or dressing.

It was for Camors a whole century of torment. One thought which often disquieted him revisited him with double poignancy. The Marquise did not love him. She only wished to revenge herself for the past, and after disgracing him would laugh at him. She had made him sign the contract, and then had escaped him. In the midst of these tortures of his pride, his passion, instead of weakening, increased.

The fourth day after their interview he did not go to her house. He hoped to meet her in the evening at the Viscountess d'Oilly's, where he usually saw her every Friday. This lady had been formerly the most tender

friend of the Count's father. It was to her the Count had thought proper to confide the education of his son.

Camors had preserved for her a kind of affection. She was an amiable woman, whom he liked and laughed at.

No longer young, she had been compelled to renounce gallantry, which had been the chief occupation of her youth, and never having had much taste for devotion, she conceived the idea of having a salon. She received there some distinguished men, savants and artists, who piqued themselves on being free-thinkers.

The Viscountess, in order to fit herself for her new position, resolved to enlighten herself. She attended public lectures and conferences, which began to be fashionable. She spoke easily about spontaneous generation. She manifested a lively surprise when Camors, who delighted in tormenting her, deigned to inform her that men were descended from monkeys.

"Now, my friend," she said to him, "I can not really admit that. How can you think your grandfather was a monkey, you who are so handsome?"

She reasoned on everything with the same force.

Although she boasted of being a sceptic, sometimes in the morning she went out, concealed by a thick veil, and entered St. Sulpice, where she confessed and put herself on good terms with God, in case He should exist. She was rich and well connected, and in spite of the irregularities of her youth, the best people visited her house.

Madame de Campvallon permitted herself to be introduced by M. de Camors. Madame de la Roche-

Jugan followed her there, because she followed her everywhere, and took her son Sigismund. On this evening the reunion was small. M. de Camors had only been there a few moments, when he had the satisfaction of seeing the General and the Marquise enter. She tranquilly expressed to him her regret at not having been at home the preceding day; but it was impossible to hope for a more decided explanation in a circle so small, and under the vigilant eye of Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Camors interrogated vainly the face of his young cousin. It was as beautiful and cold as usual. His anxiety increased; he would have given his life at that moment to hear her say one word of love.

The Viscountess liked the play of wit, as she had little herself. They played at her house such little games as were then fashionable. Those little games are not always innocent, as we shall see.

They had distributed pencils, pens, and packages of paper—some of the players sitting around large tables, and some in separate chairs—and scratched mysteriously, in turn, questions and answers. During this time the General played whist with Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Madame Campvallon did not usually take part in these games, as they fatigued her. Camors was therefore astonished to see her accept the pencil and paper offered her.

This singularity awakened his attention and put him on his guard. He himself joined in the game, contrary to his custom, and even charged himself with collecting in the basket the small notes as they were written.

An hour passed without any special incident. The treasures of wit were dispensed. The most delicate and unexpected questions—such as, "What is love?" "Do you think that friendship can exist between the sexes?" "Is it sweeter to love or to be loved?"—succeeded each other with corresponding replies. All at once the Marquise gave a slight scream, and they saw a drop of blood trickle down her forehead. She laughed, and showed her little silver pencil-case, which had a pen at one end, with which she had scratched her forehead in her abstraction.

The attention of Camors was redoubled from this moment—the more so from a rapid and significant glance from the Marquise, which seemed to warn him of an approaching event. She was sitting a little in shadow in one corner, in order to meditate more at ease on questions and answers. An instant later Camors was passing around the room collecting notes. She deposited one in the basket, slipping another into his hand with the cat-like dexterity of her sex. In the midst of these papers, which each person amused himself with reading, Camors found no difficulty in retaining without remark the clandestine note of the Marquise. It was written in red ink, a little pale, but very legible, and contained these words:

"I belong, soul, body, honor, riches, to my best-beloved cousin, Louis de Camors, from this moment and forever.

"Written and signed with the pure blood of my veins, March 5, 185–.

"CHARLOTTE DE LUC D'ESTRELLES."

All the blood of Camors surged to his brain—a cloud came over his eyes—he rested his hand on the marble table, then suddenly his face was covered with a mortal paleness. These symptoms did not arise from remorse or fear; his passion overshadowed all. He felt a boundless joy. He saw the world at his feet.

It was by this act of frankness and of extraordinary audacity, seasoned by the bloody mysticism so familiar to the sixteenth century, which she adored, that the Marquise de Campvallon surrendered herself to her lover and sealed their fatal union.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

NEARLY six weeks had passed after this last episode. It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the Marquise awaited Camors, who was to come after the session of the Corps Législatif. There was a sudden knock at one of the doors of her room, which communicated with her husband's apartment. It was the General. She remarked with surprise, and even with fear, that his countenance was agitated.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" she said. "Are you ill?"

"No," replied the General, "not at all."

He placed himself before her, and looked at her some moments before speaking, his eyes rolling wildly.

"Charlotte!" he said at last, with a painful smile, "I must own to you my folly. I am almost mad since morning—I have received such a singular letter. Would you like to see it?"

"If you wish," she replied.

He took a letter from his pocket, and gave it to her. The writing was evidently carefully disguised, and it was not signed.

"An anonymous letter?" said the Marquise, whose

eyebrows were slightly raised, with an expression of disdain; then she read the letter, which was as follows:

"A true friend, General, feels indignant at seeing your confidence and your loyalty abused. You are deceived by those whom you love most.

"A man who is covered with your favors and a woman who owes everything to you are united by a secret intimacy which outrages you. They are impatient for the hour when they can divide your spoils.

"He who regards it as a pious duty to warn you does not desire to calumniate any one. He is sure that your honor is respected by her to whom you have confided it, and that she is still worthy of your confidence and esteem. She wrongs you in allowing herself to count upon the future, which your best friend dates from your death. He seeks your widow and your estate.

"The poor woman submits against her will to the fascinations of a man too celebrated for his successful affairs of the heart. But this man, your friend—almost your son—how can he excuse his conduct? Every honest person must be shocked by such behavior, and particularly he whom a chance conversation informed of the fact, and who obeys his conscience in giving you this information."

The Marquise, after reading it, returned the letter coldly to the General.

"Sign it Eléanore-Jeanne de la Roche-Jugan!" she said.

"Do you think so?" asked the General.

"It is as clear as day," replied the Marquise. "These expressions betray her—'*a pious duty to warn you*'—'*celebrated for his successful affairs of the heart*'—'*every honest person.*' She can disguise her writing, but not her style. But what is still more conclusive is that which

she attributes to Monsieur de Camors—for I suppose it alludes to him—and to his private prospects and calculations. This can not have failed to strike you, as it has me, I suppose?"

"If I thought this vile letter was her work," cried the General, "I never would see her again during my life."

"Why not? It is better to laugh at it!"

The General began one of his solemn promenades across the room. The Marquise looked uneasily at the clock. Her husband, intercepting one of these glances, suddenly stopped.

"Do you expect Camors to-day?" he inquired.

"Yes; I think he will call after the session."

"I think he will," responded the General, with a convulsive smile. "And do you know, my dear," he added, "the absurd idea which has haunted me since I received this infamous letter?—for I believe that infamy is contagious."

"You have conceived the idea of observing our interview?" said the Marquise, in a tone of indolent raillery.

"Yes," said the General, "there—behind that curtain—as in a theatre; but, thank God! I have been able to resist this base intention. If ever I allow myself to play so mean a part, I should wish at least to do it with your knowledge and consent."

"And do you ask me to consent to it?" asked the Marquise.

"My poor Charlotte!" said the General, in a sad and almost supplicating tone, "I am an old fool—an over-

grown child—but I feel that this miserable letter will poison my life. I shall have no more an hour of peace and confidence. What can you expect? I was so cruelly deceived before. I am an honorable man, but I have been taught that all men are not like myself. There are some things which to me seem as impossible as walking on my head, yet I see others doing these things every day. What can I say to you? After reading this perfidious letter, I could not help recollecting that your intimacy with Camors has greatly increased of late!"

"Without doubt," said the Marquise, "I am very fond of him!"

"I remembered also your *tête-à-tête* with him, the other night, in the boudoir, during the ball. When I awoke you had both an air of mystery. What mysteries could there be between you two?"

"Ah, what indeed!" said the Marquise, smiling.

"And will you not tell me?"

"You shall know it at the proper time."

"Finally, I swear to you that I suspect neither of you—I neither suspect you of wronging me—of disgracing me—nor of soiling my name . . . God help me!

"But if you two should love each other, even while respecting my honor: if you love each other and confess it—if you two, even at my side, in my heart—if you, my two children, should be calculating with impatient eyes the progress of my old age—planning your projects for the future, and smiling at my approaching death—postponing your happiness only for my tomb—

you may think yourselves guiltless, but no, I tell you it would be shameful!"

Under the empire of the passion which controlled him, the voice of the General became louder. His common features assumed an air of sombre dignity and imposing grandeur. A slight shade of paleness passed over the lovely face of the young woman and a slight frown contracted her forehead.

By an effort, which in a better cause would have been sublime, she quickly mastered her weakness, and, coldly pointing out to her husband the draped door by which he had entered, said:

"Very well, conceal yourself there!"

"You will never forgive me?"

"You know little of women, my friend, if you do not know that jealousy is one of the crimes they not only pardon but love."

"My God, I am not jealous!"

"Call it yourself what you will, but station yourself there!"

"And you are sincere in wishing me to do so?"

"I pray you to do so! Retire in the interval, leave the door open, and when you hear Monsieur de Camors enter the court of the hotel, return."

"No!" said the General, after a moment's hesitation; "since I have gone so far"—and he sighed deeply —"I do not wish to leave myself the least pretext for distrust. If I leave you before he comes, I am capable of fancying——"

"That I might secretly warn him? Nothing more natural. Remain here, then. Only take a book; for

our conversation, under such circumstances, can not be lively."

He sat down.

"But," he said, "what mystery can there be between you two?"

"You shall hear!" she said, with her sphinx-like smile.

The General mechanically took up a book. She stirred the fire, and reflected. As she liked terror, danger, and dramatic incidents to blend with her intrigues, she should have been content; for at that moment shame, ruin, and death were at her door. But, to tell the truth, it was too much for her; and when she looked, in the midst of the silence which surrounded her, at the true character and scope of the perils which surrounded her, she thought her brain would fail and her heart break.

She was not mistaken as to the origin of the letter. This shameful work had indeed been planned by Madame de la Roche-Jugan. To do her justice, she had not suspected the force of the blow she was dealing. She still believed in the virtue of the Marquise; but during the perpetual surveillance she had never relaxed, she could not fail to see the changed nature of the intercourse between Camors and the Marquise. It must not be forgotten that she dreamed of securing for her son Sigismund the succession to her old friend; and she foresaw a dangerous rivalry—the germ of which she sought to destroy. To awaken the distrust of the General toward Camors, so as to cause his doors to be closed against him, was all she meditated. But her

anonymous letter, like most villainies of this kind, was a more fatal and murderous weapon than its base author imagined.

The young Marquise, then, mused while stirring the fire, casting, from time to time, a furtive glance at the clock.

M. de Camors would soon arrive—how could she warn him? In the present state of their relations it was not impossible that the very first words of Camors might immediately divulge their secret: and once betrayed, there was not only for her personal dishonor—a scandalous fall, poverty, a convent—but for her husband or her lover—perhaps for both—death!

When the bell in the lower court sounded, announcing the Count's approach, these thoughts crowded into the brain of the Marquise like a legion of phantoms. But she rallied her courage by a desperate effort and strained all her faculties to the execution of the plan she had hastily conceived, which was her last hope. And one word, one gesture, one mistake, or one carelessness of her lover, might overthrow it in a second. A moment later the door was opened by a servant, announcing M. de Camors. Without speaking, she signed to her husband to gain his hiding-place. The General, who had risen at the sound of the bell, seemed still to hesitate, but shrugging his shoulders, as if in disdain of himself, retired behind the curtain which faced the door.

M. de Camors entered the room carelessly, and advanced toward the fireplace where sat the Marquise; his smiling lips half opened to speak, when he was struck by the peculiar expression on the face of the

Marquise, and the words were frozen on his lips. This look, fixed upon him from his entrance, had a strange, weird intensity, which, without expressing anything, made him fear everything. But he was accustomed to trying situations, and as wary and prudent as he was intrepid. He ceased to smile and did not speak, but waited.

She gave him her hand without ceasing to look at him with the same alarming intensity.

"Either she is mad," he said to himself, "or there is some great peril!"

With the rapid perception of her genius and of her love, she felt he understood her; and not leaving him time to speak and compromise her, instantly said:

"It is very kind of you to keep your promise."

"Not at all," said Camors, seating himself.

"Yes! For you know you come here to be tormented." There was a pause.

"Have you at last become a convert to my fixed idea?" she added after a second.

"What fixed idea? It seems to me you have a great many!"

"Yes! But I speak of a good one—my best one, at least—of your marriage!"

"What! again, cousin?" said Camors, who, now assured of his danger and its nature, marched with a firmer foot over the burning soil.

"Yes, again, cousin; and I will tell you another thing—I have found the person."

"Ah! Then I shall run away!"

She met his smile with an imperious glance.

"Then you still adhere to that plan?" said Camors, laughing.

"Most firmly! I need not repeat to you my reasons —having preached about it all winter—in fact so much so as to disturb the General, who suspects some mystery between us."

"The General? Indeed!"

"Oh, nothing serious, you must understand. Well, let us resume the subject. Miss Campbell will not do—she is too blonde—an odd objection for me to make by the way; not Mademoiselle de Silas—too thin; not Mademoiselle Rôlet, in spite of her millions; not Mademoiselle d'Esgrigny—too much like the Bacquières and Van-Cuyps. All this is a little discouraging, you will admit; but finally everything clears up. I tell you I have discovered the right one—a marvel!"

"Her name?" said Camors.

"Marie de Tècle!"

There was silence.

"Well, you say nothing," resumed the Marquise, "because you can have nothing to say! Because she unites everything—personal beauty, family, fortune, everything—almost like a dream. Then, too, your properties join. You see how I have thought of everything, my friend! I can not imagine how we never came to think of this before!"

M. de Camors did not reply, and the Marquise began to be surprised at his silence.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "you may look a long time—there can not be a single objection—you are caught this time. Come, my friend, say yes, I implore you!" And

while her lips said "I implore you," in a tone of gracious entreaty, her look said, with terrible emphasis, "You must!"

"Will you allow me to reflect upon it, Madame?" he said at last.

"No, my friend!"

"But really," said Camors, who was very pale, "it seems to me you dispose of the hand of Mademoiselle de Tècle very readily. Mademoiselle de Tècle is rich and courted on all sides—also, her great-uncle has ideas of the province, and her mother, ideas of religion, which might well——"

"I charge myself with all that," interrupted the Marquise.

"What a mania you have for marrying people!"

"Women who do not make love, cousin, always have a mania for matchmaking."

"But seriously, you will give me a few days for reflection?"

"To reflect about what? Have you not always told me you intended marrying and have been only waiting the chance? Well, you never can find a better one than this; and if you let it slip, you will repent the rest of your life."

"But give me time to consult my family!"

"Your family—what a joke! It seems to me you have reached full age; and then—what family? Your aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan?"

"Doubtless! I do not wish to offend her."

"Ah, my dear cousin, don't be uneasy; suppress this uneasiness; I assure you she will be delighted!"

"Why should she?"

"I have my reasons for thinking so;" and the young woman in uttering these words was seized with a fit of sardonic laughter which came near convulsion, so shaken were her nerves by the terrible tension.

Camors, to whom little by little the light fell stronger on the more obscure points of the terrible enigma proposed to him, saw the necessity of shortening a scene which had overtasked her faculties to an almost insupportable degree. He rose:

"I am compelled to leave you," he said; "for I am not dining at home. But I will come to-morrow, if you will permit me."

"Certainly. You authorize me to speak to the General?"

"Well, yes, for I really can see no reasonable objection."

"Very good. I adore you!" said the Marquise. She gave him her hand, which he kissed and immediately departed.

It would have required a much keener vision than that of M. de Campvallon to detect any break, or any discordance, in the audacious comedy which had just been played before him by these two great artists.

The mute play of their eyes alone could have betrayed them; and that he could not see.

As to their tranquil, easy, natural dialogue there was not in it a word which he could seize upon, and which did not remove all his disquietude, and confound all his suspicions. From this moment, and ever afterward,

every shadow was effaced from his mind; for the ability to imagine such a plot as that in which his wife in her despair had sought refuge, or to comprehend such depth of perversity, was not in the General's pure and simple spirit.

When he reappeared before his wife, on leaving his concealment, he was constrained and awkward. With a gesture of confusion and humility he took her hand, and smiled upon her with all the goodness and tenderness of his soul beaming from his face.

At this moment the Marquise, by a new reaction of her nervous system, broke into weeping and sobbing; and this completed the General's despair.

Out of respect to this worthy man, we shall pass over a scene the interest of which otherwise is not sufficient to warrant the unpleasant effect it would produce on all honest people. We shall equally pass over without record the conversation which took place the next day between the Marquise and M. de Camors.

Camors had experienced, as we have observed, a sentiment of repulsion at hearing the name of Mademoiselle de Tècle appear in the midst of this intrigue. It amounted almost to horror, and he could not control the manifestation of it. How could he conquer this supreme revolt of his conscience to the point of submitting to the expedient which would make his intrigue safe? By what detestable sophistries he dared persuade himself that he owed everything to his accomplice—even this, we shall not attempt to explain. To explain would be to extenuate, and that we wish not to do. We shall only say that he resigned himself to this marriage. On

the path which he had entered a man can check himself as little as he can check a flash of lightning.

As to the Marquise, one must have formed no conception of this depraved though haughty spirit, if astonished at her persistence, in cold blood, and after reflection, in the perfidious plot which the imminence of her danger had suggested to her. She saw that the suspicions of the General might be reawakened another day in a more dangerous manner, if this marriage proved only a farce. She loved Camors passionately; and she loved scarcely less the dramatic mystery of their *liaison*. She had also felt a frantic terror at the thought of losing the great fortune which she regarded as her own; for the disinterestedness of her early youth had long vanished, and the idea of sinking miserably in the Parisian world, where she had long reigned by her luxury as well as her beauty, was insupportable to her.

Love, mystery, fortune—she wished to preserve them all at any price; and the more she reflected, the more the marriage of Camors appeared to her the surest safeguard.

It was true, it would give her a sort of rival. But she had too high an opinion of herself to fear anything; and she preferred Mademoiselle de Tècle to any other, because she knew her, and regarded her as an inferior in everything.

About fifteen days after, the General called on Madame de Tècle one morning, and demanded for M. de Camors her daughter's hand. It would be painful to dwell on the joy which Madame de Tècle felt; and her only surprise was that Camors had not come in person

to press his suit. But Camors had not the heart to do so. He had been at Reuilly since that morning, and called on Madame de Tècle, where he learned his overture was accepted. Once having resolved on this monstrous action, he was determined to carry it through in the most correct manner, and we know he was master of all social arts.

In the evening Madame de Tècle and her daughter, left alone, walked together a long time on their dear terrace, by the soft light of the stars—the daughter blessing her mother, and the mother thanking God—both mingling their hearts, their dreams, their kisses, and their tears—happier, poor women, than is permitted long to human beings. The marriage took place the ensuing month.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNTESS DE CAMORS

FTER passing the few weeks of the honeymoon at Reuilly, the Comte and Comtesse de Camors returned to Paris and established themselves at their hotel in the Rue de l'Impératrice. From this moment, and during the months that followed, the young wife kept up an active correspondence with her mother; and we here transcribe some of the letters, which will make us more intimately acquainted with the character of the young woman.

Madame de Camors to Madame de Tecle.

"October.

"Am I happy? No, my dearest mother! No—not happy! I have only wings and soar to heaven like a bird! I feel the sunshine in my head, in my eyes, in my heart.

"It blinds me, it enchants me, it causes me to shed delicious tears! Happy? No, my tender mother; that is not possible, when I think that I am *his* wife! The wife—understand me—of him who has reigned in my poor thoughts since I was able to think—of him whom I should have chosen out of the whole universe! When I remember that I am *his* wife, that we are united forever, how I love life! how I love you! how I love God!

"The Bois and the lake are within a few steps of us, as you

know. We ride thither nearly every morning, my *husband and I!* —I repeat, *I and my husband!* We go there, *my husband* and I—I and *my husband!*

"I know not how it is, but it is always delicious weather to me, even when it rains—as it does furiously to-day; for we have just come in, driven home by the storm.

"During our ride to-day, I took occasion to question him quietly as to some points of our history which puzzled me. First, why had he married me?

"'Because you pleased me apparently, Miss Mary.' He likes to give me this name, which recalls to him I know not what episode of my untamed youth—untamed still to him.

"'If I pleased you, why did I see you so seldom?'

"'Because I did not wish to court you until I had decided on marrying.'

"'How could I have pleased you, not being at all beautiful?'

"'You are not beautiful, it is true,' replies this cruel young man, 'but you are very pretty; and above all you are grace itself, like—your mother.'

"All these obscure points being cleared up to the complete satisfaction of Miss Mary, Miss Mary took to fast galloping; not because it was raining, but because she became suddenly—we do not know the reason why—as red as a poppy.

"Oh, beloved mother! how sweet it is to be loved by him we adore, and to be loved precisely as we wish—as we have dreamed—according to the exact programme of our young, romantic hearts!

"Did you ever believe I had ideas on such a delicate subject? Yes, dear mother, I had them. Thus, it seemed to me there were many different styles of loving—some vulgar, some pretentious, some foolish, and others, again, excessively comic. None of these seemed suited to the Prince, our neighbor. I ever felt he should love, like the Prince he is, with grace and dignity; with serious tenderness, a little stern perhaps; with amiability, but almost with condescension—as a lover, but as a master, too—in fine, like *my husband!*

"Dear angel, who art my mother! be happy in my happiness,

which was your sole work. I kiss your hands—I kiss your wings!

"I thank you! I bless you! I adore you!

"If you were near me, it would be too much happiness! I should die, I think. Nevertheless, come to us very soon. Your chamber awaits you. It is as blue as the heavens in which I float. I have already told you this, but I repeat it.

"Good-by, mother of the happiest woman in the world!

"MISS MARY,

"Comtesse de Camors."

. . . . . .

"November.

"MY MOTHER:

"You made me weep—I who await you every morning. I will say nothing to you, however; I will not beg you. If the health of my grandfather seems to you so feeble as to demand your presence, I know no prayer would take you away from your duty. Nor would I make the prayer, my angel mother!

"But exaggerate nothing, I pray you, and think your little Marie can not pass by the blue chamber without feeling a swelling of the heart. Apart from this grief which you cause her, she continues to be as happy as even you could wish.

"Her charming Prince is ever charming and ever her Prince! He takes her to see the monuments, the museums, the theatres, like the poor little provincial that she is. Is it not touching on the part of so great a personage?

"He is amused at my ecstasies—for I have ecstasies. Do not breathe it to my Uncle Des Rameures, but *Paris is superb!* The days here count double our own for thought and life.

"My husband took me to Versailles yesterday. I suspect that this, in the eyes of the people here, is rather a ridiculous episode; for I notice the Count did not boast of it. Versailles corresponds entirely with the impressions you had given me of it; for there is not the slightest change since you visited it with my grandfather.

"It is grand, solemn, and cold. There is, though, a new and very curious museum in the upper story of the palace, consisting

chiefly of original portraits of the famous men of history. Nothing pleases me more than to see these heroes of my memory passing before me in grand procession—from Charles the Bold to George Washington. Those faces my imagination has so often tried to evoke, that it seems to me we are in the Elysian Fields, and hold converse with the dead:

"You must know, my mother, I was familiar with many things that surprised M. de Camors very much. He was greatly struck by my knowledge of science and my genius. I did no more, as you may imagine, than respond to his questions; but it seemed to astonish him that I could respond at all.

"Why should he ask me these things? If he did not know how to distinguish the different Princesses of Conti, the answer is simple.

"But *I* knew, because my mother taught me. That is simple enough too.

"We dined afterward, at my suggestion, at a restaurant. Oh, my mother! this was the happiest moment of my life! To dine at a restaurant with my husband was the most delightful of all dissipations!

"I have said he seemed astonished at my learning. I ought to add in general, he seemed astonished whenever I opened my lips. Did he imagine me a mute? I speak little, I acknowledge, however, for he inspires me with a ceaseless fear: I am afraid of displeasing him, of appearing silly before him, or pretentious, or pedantic. The day when I shall be at ease with him, and when I can show him my good sense and gratitude—if that day ever comes—I shall be relieved of a great weight on my mind, for truly I sometimes fear he looks on me as a child.

"The other day I stopped before a toy-shop on the Boulevard. What a blunder! And as he saw my eye fixed on a magnificent squadron of dolls——

"'Do you wish one, Miss Mary?' he said.

"Was not this horrible, my mother—from him who knows everything except the Princesses of Conti? He explained everything to me; but briefly in a word, as if to a person he despaired

of ever making understand him. And I understand so well all the time, my poor little mother!

"But so much the better, say I; for if he loves me while thinking me silly, what will it be later!

"With fond love, your

"MARIE."

. . . . . .

"December.

"All Paris has returned once more, my dear mother, and for fifteen days I have been occupied with visits. The men here do not usually visit; but my husband is obliged to present me for the first time to the persons I ought to know. He accompanies me there, which is much more agreeable to me than to him, I believe.

"He is more serious than usual. Is not this the only form in which amiable men show their bad humor? The people we visit look on me with a certain interest. The woman whom this great lord has honored with his choice is evidently an object of great curiosity. This flatters and intimidates me; I blush and feel constrained; I appear awkward. When they find me awkward and insignificant, they stare. They believe he married me for my fortune: then I wish to cry. We reënter the carriage, he smiles upon me, and I am in heaven! Such are our visits.

"You must know, my mother, that to me Madame Campvallon is divine. She often takes me to her box at the *Italiens*, as mine will not be vacant until January. Yesterday she gave a little *fete* for me in her beautiful salon: the General opened the ball with me.

"Oh! my mother, what a wonderfully clever man the General is! And I admire him because he admires you!

"The Marquise presented to me all the best dancers. They were young gentlemen, with their necks so uncovered it almost gave me a chill. I never before had seen men bare-necked and the fashion is not becoming. It was very evident, however, that they considered themselves indispensable and charming. Their de-

portment was insolent and self-sufficient; their eyes were disdainful and all-conquering.

"Their mouths ever open to breathe freer, their coat-tails flapping like wings, they take one by the waist—as one takes his own property. Informing you by a look that they are about to do you the honor of removing you, they whirl you away; then, panting for breath, inform you by another look that they will do themselves the pleasure of stopping—and they stop. Then they rest a moment, panting, laughing, showing their teeth; another look—and they repeat the same performance. They are wonderful!

"Louis waltzed with me and seemed satisfied. I saw him for the first time waltz with the Marquise. Oh, my mother, it was the dance of the stars!

"One thing which struck me this evening, as always, was the manifest idolatry with which the women regard my husband. This, my tender mother, terrifies me. Why—I ask myself—why did he choose me? How can I please him? How can I succeed?

"Behold the result of all my meditations! A folly perhaps, but of which the effect is to reassure me:

"Portrait of the Comtesse de Camors, drawn by herself.

"The Comtesse de Camors, formerly Marie de Tècle, is a personage who, having reached her twentieth year, looks older. She is not beautiful, as her husband is the first person to confess. He says she is pretty; but she doubts even this. Let us see. She has very long limbs, a fault which she shares with Diana, the Huntress, and which probably gives to the gait of the Countess a lightness it might not otherwise possess. Her body is naturally short, and on horseback appears to best advantage. She is plump without being gross.

"Her features are irregular; the mouth being too large and the lips too thick, with—alas! the shade of a moustache; white teeth, a little too small; a commonplace nose, a slightly pug; and her mother's eyes—her best feature. She has the eyebrows of her Uncle Des Rameures, which gives an air of severity to the face and

neutralizes the good-natured expression—a reflex from the softness of her heart.

"She has the dark complexion of her mother, which is more becoming to her mother than to her. Add to all this, blue-black hair in great silky masses. On the whole, one knows not what to pronounce her.

"There, my mother, is my portrait! Intended to reassure me, it has hardly done so; for it seems to me to be that of an ugly little woman!

"I wish to be the most lively of women; I wish to be one of the most distinguished. I wish to be one of the most captivating! But, oh, my mother! if I please him I am still more enchanted! On the whole, thank God! he finds me perhaps much better than I am: for men have not the same taste in these matters that we have.

"But what I really can not comprehend, is why he has so little admiration for the Marquise de Campvallon. His manner is very cold to her. Were I a man, I should be wildly in love with that superb woman! Good-night, most beloved of mothers!

. . . . . .

"January.

"You complain of me, my cherished one! The tone of my letters wounds you! You can not comprehend how this matter of my personal appearance haunts me. I scrutinize it; I compare it with that of others. There is something of levity in that which hurts you? You ask how can I think a man attaches himself to these things, while the merits of mind and soul go for nothing?

"But, my dearest mother, how will these merits of mind and of soul—supposing your daughter to possess them—serve her, unless she possesses the courage or has the opportunity to display them? And when I summon up the courage, it seems to me the occasion never comes.

"For I must confess to you that this delicious Paris is not perfect; and I discover, little by little, the spots upon the sun.

"Paris is the most charming place! The only pity is that it has inhabitants! Not but that they are agreeable, for they are only too much so; only they are also very careless, and appear to my view to live and die without reflecting much on what they are doing. It is not their fault; they have no time.

"Without leaving Paris, they are incessant travellers, eternally distracted by motion and novelty. Other travellers, when they have visited some distant corner—forgetting for a while their families, their duties, and their homes—return and settle down again. But these Parisians never do. Their life is an endless voyage; they have no home. That which elsewhere is the great aim of life is secondary here. One has here, as elsewhere, an establishment —a house, a private chamber. One must have. Here one is wife or mother, husband or father, just as elsewhere; but, my poor mother, they are these things just as little as possible. The whole interest centres not in the homes; but in the streets, the museums, the salons, the theatres, and the clubs. It radiates to the immense outside life, which in all its forms night and day agitates Paris, attracts, excites, and enervates you; steals your time, your mind, your soul—and devours them all!

"Paris is the most delicious of places to visit—the worst of places to live in.

"Understand well, my mother, that in seeking by what qualifies I can best attract my husband—who is the best of men, doubtless, but of Parisian men nevertheless—I have continually reflected on merits which may be seen at once, which do not require time to be appreciated.

"Finally, I do not deny that all this is miserable cynicism, unworthy of you and of myself; for you know I am not at heart a bad little woman. Certainly, if I could keep Monsieur de Camors for a year or two at an old chateau in the midst of a solitary wood, I should like it much. I could then see him more frequently, I could then become familiar with his august person, and could develop my little talents under his charmed eyes. But then this might weary

him and would be too easy. Life and happiness, I know, are not so easily managed. All is difficulty, peril, and conflict.

"What joy, then, to conquer! And I swear to you, my mother, that I will conquer! I will force him to know me as you know me; to love me, not as he now does, but as you do, for many good reasons of which he does not yet dream.

"Not that he believes me absolutely a fool; I think he has abandoned that idea for at least two days past.

"How he came thus to think, my next letter shall explain.

"Your own

"MARIE."

CHAPTER XVI

THE REPTILE STRIVES TO CLIMB

"March.

OU will remember, my mother, that the Count has as secretary a man named Vautrot. The name is a bad one; but the man himself is a good enough creature, except that I somewhat dislike his catlike style of looking at one.

"Well, Monsieur de Vautrot lives in the house with us. He comes early in the morning, breakfasts at some neighboring *cafe*, passes the day in the Count's study, and often remains to dine with us, if he has work to finish in the evening.

"He is an educated man, and knows a little of everything; and he has undertaken many occupations before he accepted the subordinate though lucrative post he now occupies with my husband. He loves literature; but not that of his time and of his country, perhaps because he himself has failed in this. He prefers foreign writers and poets, whom he quotes with some taste, though with too much declamation.

"Most probably his early education was defective; for on all occasions, when speaking with us, he says, 'Yes, Monsieur le Comte!' or 'Certainly, Madame la Comtesse!' as if he were a servant. Yet withal, he has a peculiar pride, or perhaps I should say insufferable vanity. But his great fault, in my eyes, is the scoffing tone he adopts, when the subject is religion or morals.

"Two days ago, while we were dining, Vautrot allowed himself to indulge in a rather violent tirade of this description. It was certainly contrary to all good taste.

"'My dear Vautrot,' my husband said quietly to him, 'to me these pleasantries of yours are indifferent; but pray remember, that while you are a strong-minded man, my wife is a weak-minded woman; and strength, you know, should respect weakness.'

"Monsieur Vautrot first grew white, then red, and finally green. He rose, bowed awkwardly, and immediately afterward left the table. Since that time I have remarked his manner has been more reserved. The moment I was alone with Louis, I said:

"'You may think me indiscreet, but pray let me ask you a question. How can you confide all your affairs and all your secrets to a man who professes to have no principles?'

"Monsieur de Camors laughed.

"'Oh, he talks thus out of bravado,' he answered. 'He thinks to make himself more interesting in your eyes by these Mephistophelian airs. At bottom he is a good fellow.'

"'But,' I answered, 'he has faith in nothing.'

"'Not in much, I believe. Yet he has never deceived me. He is an honorable man.'

"I opened my eyes wide at this.

"'Well,' he said, with an amused look, 'what is the matter, Miss Mary?'

"'What is this honor you speak of?'

"'Let me ask your definition of it, Miss Mary,' he replied.

"'*Mon Dieu!*' I cried, blushing deeply, 'I know but little of it, but it seems to me that honor separated from morality is no great thing; and morality without religion is nothing. They all constitute a chain. Honor hangs to the last link, like a flower; but if the chain be broken, honor falls with the rest.' He looked at me with strange eyes, as if he were not only confounded but disquieted by my philosophy. Then he gave a deep sigh, and rising said:

"'Very neat, that definition—very neat.'

"That night, at the opera, he plied me with *bonbons* and orange ices. Madame de Campvallon accompanied us; and at parting, I begged her to call for me next day on her way to the Bois, for she is my idol. She is so lovely and so distinguished—and she

knows it well. I love to be with her. On our return home, Louis remained silent, contrary to his custom. Suddenly he said, brusquely:

"'Marie, do you go with the Marquise to the Bois to-morrow?'

"'Yes.'

"'But you see her often, it seems to me—morning and evening. You are always with her.'

"'Heavens! I do it to be agreeable to you. Is not Madame de Campvallon a good associate?'

"'Excellent; only in general I do not admire female friendships. But I did wrong to speak to you on this subject. You have wit and discretion enough to preserve the proper limits.'

"This, my mother, was what he said to me. I embrace you.

Ever your

"MARIE."

. . . . . .

"March.

"I hope, my own mother, not to bore you this year with a catalogue of *fetes* and festivals, lamps and girandoles; for Lent is coming. To-day is Ash-Wednesday. Well, we dance to-morrow evening at Madame d'Oilly's. I had hoped not to go, but I saw Louis was disappointed, and I feared to offend Madame d'Oilly, who has acted a mother's part to my husband. Lent here is only an empty name. I sigh to myself: 'Will they never stop! Great heavens! will they never cease amusing themselves?'

"I must confess to you, my darling mother, I amuse myself too much to be happy. I depended on Lent for some time to myself, and see how they efface the calendar!

"This dear Lent! What a sweet, honest, pious invention it is, notwithstanding. How sensible is our religion! How well it understands human weakness and folly! How far-seeing in its regulations! How indulgent also! for to limit pleasure is to pardon it.

"I also love pleasure—the beautiful toilets that make us resemble flowers, the lighted salons, the music, the gay voices and the

dance. Yes, I love all these things; I experience their charming confusion; I palpitate, I inhale their intoxication. But always—always! at Paris in the winter—at the springs in summer—ever this crowd, ever this whirl, this intoxication of pleasure! All become like savages, like negroes, and—dare I say so?—bestial! Alas for Lent!

"He foresaw it. He told us, as the priest told me this morning: 'Remember you have a soul: Remember you have duties!—a husband—a child—a mother—a God!'

"Then, my mother, we should retire within ourselves; should pass the time in grave thought between the church and our homes; should converse on solemn and serious subjects; and should dwell in the moral world to gain a foothold in heaven! This season is intended as a wholesome interval to prevent our running frivolity into dissipation, and pleasure into convulsion; to prevent our winter's mask from becoming our permanent visage. This is entirely the opinion of Madame Jaubert.

"Who is this Madame Jaubert? you will ask. She is a little Parisian angel whom my mother would dearly love! I met her almost everywhere—but chiefly at St. Phillipe de Roule—for several months without being aware that she is our neighbor, that her hotel adjoins ours. Such is Paris!

"She is a graceful person, with a soft and tender, but decided air. We sat near each other at church; we gave each other side-glances; we pushed our chairs to let each other pass; and in our softest voices would say, 'Excuse me, Madame!' 'Oh, Madame!' My glove would fall, she would pick it up; I would offer her the holy water, and receive a sweet smile, with 'Dear Madame!' Once at a concert at the Tuileries we observed each other at a distance, and smiled recognition; when any part of the music pleased us particularly we glanced smilingly at each other. Judge of my surprise next morning when I saw my affinity enter the little Italian house next ours—and enter it, too, as if it were her home. On inquiry I found she was Madame Jaubert, the wife of a tall, fair young man who is a civil engineer.

"I was seized with a desire to call upon my neighbor. I spoke

of it to Louis, blushing slightly, for I remembered he did not approve of intimacies between women. But above all, he loves me!

"Notwithstanding he slightly shrugged his shoulders—'Permit me at least, Miss Mary, to make some inquiries about these people.'

"A few days afterward he had made them, for he said: 'Miss Mary, you may visit Madame Jaubert; she is a perfectly proper person.'

"I first flew to my husband's neck, and thence went to call upon Madame Jaubert.

"'It is I, Madame!'

"'Oh, Madame, permit me!'

"And we embraced each other and were good friends immediately.

"Her husband is a civil engineer, as I have said. He was once occupied with great inventions and with great industrial works; but that was only for a short time. Having inherited a large estate, he abandoned his studies and did nothing—at least nothing but mischief. When he married to increase his fortune, his pretty little wife had a sad surprise. He was never seen at home; always at the club—always behind the scenes at the opera—always going to the devil! He gambled, he had mistresses and shameful affairs. But worse than all, he drank—he came to his wife drunk. One incident, which my pen almost refuses to write, will give you an idea. Think of it! He conceived the idea of sleeping in his boots! There, my mother, is the pretty fellow my sweet little friend transformed, little by little, into a decent man, a man of merit, and an excellent husband!

"And she did it all by gentleness, firmness, and sagacity. Now is not this encouraging?—for, God knows, my task is less difficult.

"Their household charms me; for it proves that one may build for one's self, even in the midst of this Paris, a little nest such as one dreams of. These dear neighbors are inhabitants of Paris—not its prey. They have their fireside; they own it, and it belongs to them. Paris is at their door—so much the better. They have ever a relish for refined amusement; 'they drink at the fountain,'

but do not drown themselves in it. Their habits are the same, passing their evenings in conversation, reading, or music; stirring the fire and listening to the wind and rain without, as if they were in a forest.

"Life slips gently through their fingers, thread by thread, as in our dear old country evenings.

"My mother, they are happy!

"Here, then, is my dream—here is my plan.

"My husband has no vices, as Monsieur Jaubert had. He has only the habits of all the brilliant men of his Paris-world. It is necessary, my own mother, gradually to reform him; to suggest insensibly to him the new idea that one may pass one evening at home in company with a beloved and loving wife, without dying suddenly of consumption.

"The rest will follow.

"What is this rest? It is the taste for a quiet life, for the serious sweetness of the domestic hearth—the family taste—the idea of seclusion—the recovered soul!

"Is it not so, my good angel? Then trust me. I am more than ever full of ardor, courage, and confidence. For he loves me with all his heart, with more levity, perhaps, than I deserve; but still—*he loves me!*

"He loves me; he spoils me; he heaps presents upon me. There is no pleasure he does not offer me, except, be it understood, the pleasure of passing one evening at home together.

"But he loves me! That is the great point—*he loves me!*

"Now, dearest mother, let me whisper one final word—a word that makes me laugh and cry at the same time. It seems to me that for some time past I have had two hearts—a large one of my own, and—*another—smaller!*

"Oh, my mother! I see you in tears. But it is a great mystery this. It is a dream of heaven; but perhaps only a dream, which I have not yet told even to my husband—only to my adorable mother! Do not weep, for it is not yet quite certain.

"Your naughty

"MISS MARY."

In reply to this letter Madame de Camors received one three mornings after, announcing to her the death of her grandfather. The Comte de Tècle had died of apoplexy, of which his state of health had long given warning. Madame de Tècle foresaw that the first impulse of her daughter would be to join her to share her sad bereavement. She advised her strongly against undertaking the fatigue of the journey, and promised to visit her in Paris, as soon as she conveniently could. The mourning in the family heightened in the heart of the Countess the uneasy feeling and vague sadness her last letters had indicated.

She was much less happy than she told her mother; for the first enthusiasm and first illusions of marriage could not long deceive a spirit so quick and acute as hers.

A young girl who marries is easily deceived by the show of an affection of which she is the object. It is rare that she does not adore her husband and believe she is adored by him, simply because he has married her.

The young heart opens spontaneously and diffuses its delicate perfume of love and its songs of tenderness; and enveloped in this heavenly cloud all seems love around it. But, little by little, it frees itself; and, too often, recognizes that this delicious harmony and intoxicating atmosphere which charmed it came only from itself.

Thus was it with the Countess; so far as the pen can render the shadows of a feminine soul. Such were the impressions which, day by day, penetrated the very soul of our poor "Miss Mary."

It was nothing more than this; but this was everything to her!

The idea of being betrayed by her husband—and that, too, with cruel premeditation—never had arisen to torture her soul. But, beyond those delicate attentions to her which she never exaggerated in her letters to her mother, she felt herself disdained and slighted. Marriage had not changed Camors's habits: he dined at home, instead of at his club, that was all. She believed herself loved, however, but with a lightness that was almost offensive. Yet, though she was sometimes sad and nearly in tears, she did not despair; this valiant little heart attached itself with intrepid confidence to all the happy chances the future might have in store for it.

M. de Camors continued very indifferent—as one may readily comprehend—to the agitation which tormented this young heart, but which never occurred to him for a moment. For himself, strange as it may appear, he was happy enough. This marriage had been a painful step to take; but, once confirmed in his sin, he became reconciled to it. But his conscience, seared as it was, had some living fibres in it; and he would not have failed in the duty he thought he owed to his wife. These sentiments were composed of a sort of indifference, blended with pity. He was vaguely sorry for this child, whose existence was absorbed and destroyed between those of two beings of nature superior to her own; and he hoped she would always remain ignorant of the fate to which she was condemned. He resolved never to neglect anything that might extenuate its rigor; but he belonged, nevertheless, more than ever solely to

the passion which was the supreme crime of his life. For his intrigue with Madame de Campvallon, continually excited by mystery and danger—and conducted with profound address by a woman whose cunning was equal to her beauty—continued as strong, after years of enjoyment, as at first.

The gracious courtesy of M. de Camors, on which he piqued himself, as regarded his wife, had its limits; as the young Countess perceived whenever she attempted to abuse it. Thus, on several occasions she declined receiving guests on the ground of indisposition, hoping her husband would not abandon her to her solitude. She was in error.

The Count gave her in reality, under these circumstances, a *tête-à-tête* of a few minutes after dinner; but near nine o'clock he would leave her with perfect tranquillity. Perhaps an hour later she would receive a little packet of *bonbons*, or a pretty basket of choice fruit, that would permit her to pass the evening as she might. These little gifts she sometimes divided with her neighbor, Madame Jaubert; sometimes with M. de Vautrot, secretary to her husband.

This M. de Vautrot, for whom she had at first conceived an aversion, was gradually getting into her good graces. In the absence of her husband she always found him at hand; and referred to him for many little details, such as addresses, invitations, the selection of books and the purchase of furniture. From this came a certain familiarity; she began to call him Vautrot, or "My good Vautrot," while he zealously performed all her little commissions. He manifested for her a great

deal of respectful attention, and even refrained from indulging in the sceptical sneers which he knew displeased her. Happy to witness this reform and to testify her gratitude, she invited him to remain on two or three evenings when he came to take his leave, and talked with him of books and the theatres.

When her mourning kept her at home, M. de Camors passed the two first evenings with her until ten o'clock. But this effort fatigued him, and the poor young woman, who had already erected an edifice for the future on this frail basis, had the mortification of observing that on the third evening he had resumed his bachelor habits.

This was a great blow to her, and her sadness became greater than it had been up to that time; so much so in fact, that solitude was almost unbearable. She had hardly been long enough in Paris to form intimacies. Madame Jaubert came to her friend as often as she could; but in the intervals the Countess adopted the habit of retaining Vautrot, or even of sending for him. Camors himself, three fourths of the time, would bring him in before going out in the evening.

"I bring you Vautrot, my dear," he would say, "and Shakespeare. You can read him together."

Vautrot read well; and though his heavy declamatory style frequently annoyed the Countess, she thus managed to kill many a long evening, while waiting the expected visit of Madame de Tècle. But Vautrot, whenever he looked at her, wore such a sympathetic air and seemed so mortified when she did not invite him to stay, that, even when wearied of him, she frequently did so.

About the end of the month of April, M. Vautrot was alone with the Countess de Camors about ten o'clock in the evening. They were reading Goethe's *Faust*, which she had never before heard. This reading seemed to interest the young woman more than usual, and with her eyes fixed on the reader, she listened to it with rapt attention. She was not alone fascinated by the work, but—as is frequently the case—she traced her own thoughts and her own history in the fiction of the poet.

We all know with what strange clairvoyance a mind possessed with a fixed idea discovers resemblances and allusions in accidental description. Madame de Camors perceived without doubt some remote connection between her husband and Faust—between herself and Marguerite; for she could not help showing that she was strangely agitated. She could not restrain the violence of her emotion, when Marguerite in prison cries out, in her agony and madness:

Marguerite.

Who has given you, headsman, this power over me? You come to me while it is yet midnight. Be merciful and let me live.

Is not to-morrow morning soon enough?

I am yet so young—so young! and am to die already! I was fair, too; that was my undoing. My true love was near, now he is far away.

Torn lies my garland; scattered the flowers. Don't take hold of me so roughly! spare me! spare me What have I done to you? Let me not implore you in vain! I never saw you before in all my life, you know.

Faust.

Can I endure this misery?

Marguerite.

I am now entirely in thy power. Only let me give suck to the child. I pressed it this whole night to my heart. They took it away to vex me, and now say I killed it, and I shall never be happy again. They sing songs upon me! It is wicked of the people. An old tale ends so—who bids them apply it?

Faust.

A lover lies at thy feet, to unloose the bonds of wickedness.

What a blending of confused sentiments, of powerful sympathies, of vague apprehensions, suddenly seized on the breast of the young Countess! One can hardly imagine their force—to the very verge of distracting her. She turned on her fauteuil and closed her beautiful eyes, as if to keep back the tears which rolled under the fringe of the long lashes.

At this moment Vautrot ceased to read, dropped his book, sighed profoundly, and stared a moment.

Then he knelt at the feet of the Comtesse de Camors! He took her hand; he said, with a tragic sigh, "Poor angel!"

It will be difficult to understand this incident and the unfortunately grave results that followed it, without having the moral and physical portrait of its principal actor.

M. Hippolyte Vautrot was a handsome man and knew it perfectly. He even flattered himself on a certain resemblance to his patron, the Comte de Camors. Partly from nature and partly from continual imitation, this idea had some foundation; for he resembled the

Count as much as a vulgar man can resemble one of the highest polish.

He was the son of a small confectioner in the provinces; had received from his father an honestly acquired fortune, and had dissipated it in the varied enterprises of his adventurous life. The influence of his college, however, obtained for him a place in the Seminary. He left it to come to Paris and study law; placed himself with an attorney; attempted literature without success; gambled on the Bourse and lost there.

He had successively knocked with feverish hand at all the doors of Fortune, and none had opened to him, because, though his ambition was great, his capacity was limited. Subordinate positions, for which alone he was fit, he did not want. He would have made a good tutor: he sighed to be a poet. He would have been a respectable curé in the country: he pined to be a bishop. Fitted for an excellent secretary, he aspired to be a minister. In fine, he wished to be a great man, and consequently was a failure as a little one.

But he made himself a hypocrite; and that he found much easier. He supported himself on the one hand by the philosophic society to be met at Madame d'Oilly's; on the other, by the orthodox reunions of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

By these influences he contrived to secure the secretaryship to the Comte de Camors, who, in his general contempt of the human species, judged Vautrot to be as good as any other. Now, familiarity with M. de Camors was, morally, fearfully prejudicial to the secretary. It had, it is true, the effect of stripping off

his devout mask, which he seldom put on before his patron; but it terribly increased in venom the depravity which disappointment and wounded pride had secreted in his ulcerated heart.

Of course no one will imagine that M. de Camors had the bad taste to undertake deliberately the demoralization of his secretary; but contact, intimacy, and example sufficed fully to do this. A secretary is always more or less a confidant. He divines that which is not revealed to him; and Vautrot could not be long in discovering that his patron's success did not arise, morally, from too much principle—in politics, from excess of conviction—in business, from a mania for scruples! The intellectual superiority of Camors, refined and insolent as it was, aided to blind Vautrot, showing him evil which was not only prosperous, but was also radiant in grace and prestige. For these reasons he most profoundly admired his master—admired, imitated, and execrated him!

Camors professed for him and for his solemn airs an utter contempt, which he did not always take the trouble to conceal; and Vautrot trembled when some burning sarcasm fell from such a height on the old wound of his vanity—that wound which was ever sore within him. What he hated most in Camors was his easy and insolent triumph—his rapid and unmerited fortune—all those enjoyments which life yielded him without pain, without toil, without conscience—peacefully tasted! But what he hated above all, was that this man had thus obtained these things while he had vainly striven for them.

Assuredly, in this Vautrot was not an exception. The same example presented to a healthier mind would not have been much more salutary, for we must tell those who, like M. de Camors, trample under foot all principles of right, and nevertheless imagine that their secretaries, their servants, their wives and their children, may remain virtuous—we must tell these that while they wrong others they deceive themselves! And this was the case with Hippolyte Vautrot.

He was about forty years of age—a period of life when men often become very vicious, even when they have been passably virtuous up to that time. He affected an austere and puritanical air; was the great man of the *café* he frequented; and there passed judgment on his contemporaries and pronounced them all inferior. He was difficult to please—in point of virtue demanding heroism; in talent, genius; in art, perfection.

His political opinions were those of Erostratus, with this difference—always in favor of the ancient—that Vautrot, after setting fire to the temple, would have robbed it also. In short, he was a fool, but a vicious fool as well.

If M. de Camors, at the moment of leaving his luxurious study that evening, had had the bad taste to turn and apply his eye to the keyhole, he would have seen something greatly to astonish even him.

He would have seen this "honorable man" approach a beautiful Italian cabinet inlaid with ivory, turn over the papers in the drawers, and finally open in the most natural manner a very complicated lock, the

key of which the Count at that moment had in his pocket.

It was after this search that M. Vautrot repaired with his volume of *Faust* to the boudoir of the young Countess, at whose feet we have already left him too long..

CHAPTER XVII

LIGHTNING FROM A CLEAR SKY

MADAME DE CAMORS had closed her eyes to conceal her tears. She opened them at the instant Vautrot seized her hand and called her "Poor angel!"

Seeing the man on his knees, she could not comprehend it, and only exclaimed, simply:

"Are you mad, Vautrot?"

"Yes, I am mad!" Vautrot threw his hair back with a romantic gesture common to him, and, as he believed, to the poets—"Yes, I am mad with love and with pity, for I see your sufferings, pure and noble victim!"

The Countess only stared in blank astonishment.

"Repose yourself with confidence," he continued, "on a heart that will be devoted to you until death—a heart into which your tears now penetrate to its most sacred depths!"

The Countess did not wish her tears to penetrate to such a distance, so she dried them.

A man on his knees before a woman he adores must appear to her either sublime or ridiculous. Unfortunately, the attitude of Vautrot, at once theatrical and awkward, did not seem sublime to the Countess. To

her lively imagination it was irresistibly ludicrous. A bright gleam of amusement illumined her charming countenance; she bit her lip to conceal it, but it shone out of her eyes nevertheless.

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror. Otherwise, like Vautrot, he exposes himself to be laughed at.

"Rise, my good Vautrot," the Countess said, gravely. "This book has evidently bewildered you. Go and take some rest and we will forget this; only you must never forget yourself again in this manner."

Vautrot rose. He was livid.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said, bitterly, "the love of a great heart never can be an offence. Mine at least would have been sincere; mine would have been faithful: mine would not have been an infamous snare!"

The emphasis of these words displayed so evident an intention, the countenance of the young woman changed immediately. She moved uneasily on her fauteuil.

"What do you mean, Monsieur Vautrot?"

"Nothing, Madame, which you do not know, I think," he replied, meaningly.

She rose.

"You shall explain your meaning immediately to me, Monsieur!" she exclaimed; "or later, to my husband."

"But your sadness, your tears," cried the secretary, in a tone of admirable sincerity—"these made me sure you were not ignorant of it!"

"Of what? You hesitate! Speak, man!"

"*I* am not a wretch! *I* love you and pity you!—that is all;" and Vautrot sighed deeply.

"And why do you pity me?" She spoke haughtily; and though Vautrot had never suspected this imperiousness of manner or of language, he reflected hurriedly on the point at which he had arrived. More sure than ever of success, after a moment he took from his pocket a folded letter. It was one with which he had provided himself to confirm the suspicions of the Countess, now awakened for the first time.

In profound silence he unfolded and handed it to her. She hesitated a moment, then seized it. A single glance recognized the writing, for she had often exchanged notes with the Marquise de Campvallon.

Words of the most burning passion terminated thus:

"—Always a little jealous of Mary; half vexed at having given her to you. For she is pretty and—but *I!* I am beautiful, am I not, my beloved?—and, above all, I adore you!"

At the first word the Countess became fearfully pale. Finishing, she uttered a deep groan; then she reread the letter and returned it to Vautrot, as if unconscious of what she was doing.

For a few seconds she remained motionless—petrified—her eyes fixed on vacancy. A world seemed rolling down and crushing her heart.

Suddenly she turned, passed with rapid steps into her boudoir; and Vautrot heard the sound of opening and shutting drawers. A moment after she reappeared with bonnet and cloak, and crossed the boudoir with the same strong and rapid step.

Vautrot, greatly terrified, rushed to stop her.

"Madame!" he cried, throwing himself before her.

She waved him aside with an imperious gesture of her hand; he trembled and obeyed, and she left the boudoir. A moment later she was in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, going toward Paris.

It was now near midnight; cold, damp April weather, with the rain falling in great drops. The few pedestrians still on the broad pavement turned to follow with their eyes this majestic young woman, whose gait seemed hastened by some errand of life or death.

But in Paris nothing is surprising, for people witness all manner of things there. Therefore the strange appearance of Madame de Camors did not excite any extraordinary attention. A few men smiled and nodded; others threw a few words of raillery at her—both were unheeded alike. She traversed the Place de la Concorde with the same convulsive haste, and passed toward the bridge. Arriving on it, the sound of the swollen Seine rushing under the arches and against the pillars, caught her ear; she stopped, leaned against the parapet, and gazed into the angry water; then bowing her head she uttered a deep sigh, and resumed her rapid walk.

In the Rue Vanneau she stopped before a brilliantly lighted mansion, isolated from the adjoining houses by a garden wall. It was the dwelling of the Marquise de Campvallon. Arrived there, the unfortunate child knew not what to do, nor even why she had come. She had some vague design of assuring herself palpably of her misfortune; to touch it with her finger; or perhaps to find some reason, some pretext to doubt it.

She dropped down on a stone bench against the garden wall, and hid her face in both her hands, vainly striving to think. It was past midnight. The streets were deserted: a shower of rain was falling over Paris, and she was chilled to numbness.

A *sergent-de-ville* passed, enveloped in his cape. He turned and stared at the young woman; then took her roughly by the arm.

"What are you doing here?" he said, brutally.

She looked up at him with wondering eyes.

"I do not know myself," she answered.

The man looked more closely at her, discovered through all her confusion a nameless refinement and the subtle perfume of purity. He took pity on her.

"But, Madame, you can not stay here," he rejoined in a softer voice.

"No?"

"You must have some great sorrow?"

"Very great."

"What is your name?"

"The Comtesse de Camors," she said, simply.

The man looked bewildered.

"Will you tell me where you live, Madame?"

She gave the address with perfect simplicity and perfect indifference. She seemed to be thinking nothing of what she was saying. The man took a few steps, then stopped and listened to the sound of wheels approaching. The carriage was empty. He stopped it, opened the door, and requested the Countess to get in. She did so quietly, and he placed himself beside the driver.

The Comte de Camors had just reached his house and heard with surprise, from the lips of his wife's maid, the details of the Countess's mysterious disappearance, when the bell rang violently.

He rushed out and met his wife on the stairs. She had somewhat recovered her calmness on the road, and as he interrogated her with a searching glance, she made a ghastly effort to smile.

"I was slightly ill and went out a little," she said. "I do not know the streets and lost my way."

Notwithstanding the improbability of the explanation, he did not hesitate. He murmured a few soft words of reproach and placed her in the hands of her maid, who removed her wet garments.

During that time he called the *sergent-de-ville*, who remained in the vestibule, and closely interrogated him. On learning in what street and what precise spot he had found the Countess, her husband knew at once and fully the whole truth.

He went directly to his wife. She had retired and was trembling in every limb. One of her hands was resting outside the coverlet. He rushed to take it, but she withdrew it gently, with sad and resolute dignity.

The simple gesture told him they were separated forever.

By a tacit agreement, arranged by her and as tacitly accepted by him, Madame de Camors became virtually a widow.

He remained for some seconds immovable, his expression lost in the shadow of the bed-hangings; then

walked slowly across the chamber. The idea of lying to defend himself never occurred to him.

His line of conduct was already arranged—calmly, methodically. But two blue circles had sunk around his eyes, and his face wore a waxen pallor. His hands, joined behind his back, were clenched; and the ring he wore sparkled with their tremulous movement. At intervals he seemed to cease breathing, as he listened to the chattering teeth of his young wife.

After half an hour he approached the bed.

"Marie!" he said in a low voice. She turned upon him her eyes gleaming with fever.

"Marie, I am ignorant of what you know, and I shall not ask," he continued. "I have been very criminal toward you, but perhaps less so than you think. Terrible circumstances bound me with iron bands. Fate ruled me! But I seek no palliation. Judge me as severely as you wish; but I beg of you to calm yourself —preserve yourself! You spoke to me this morning of your presentiments—of your maternal hopes. Attach yourself to those thoughts, and you will always be mistress of your life. As for myself, I shall be whatever you will—a stranger or a friend. But now I feel that my presence makes you ill. I would leave you for the present, but not alone. Do you wish Madame Jaubert to come to you to-night?"

"Yes!" she murmured, faintly.

"I shall go for her; but it is not necessary to tell you that there are confidences one must reserve even from one's dearest friends."

"Except a mother?" She murmured the question with a supplicating agony very painful to see.

He grew still paler. After an instant, "Except a mother!" he said. "Be it so!"

She turned her face and buried it in the pillow.

"Your mother arrives to-morrow, does she not?" She made an affirmative motion of her head. "You can make your arrangements with her. I shall accept everything."

"Thank you," she replied, feebly.

He left the room and went to find Madame Jaubert, whom he awakened, and briefly told her that his wife had been seized with a severe nervous attack—the effect of a chill. The amiable little woman ran hastily to her friend and spent the night with her.

But she was not the dupe of the explanation Camors had given her. Women quickly understand one another in their grief. Nevertheless she asked no confidences and received none; but her tenderness to her friend redoubled. During the silence of that terrible night, the only service she could render her was to make her weep.

Nor did those laggard hours pass less bitterly for M. de Camors. He tried to take no rest, but walked up and down his apartment until daylight in a sort of frenzy. The distress of this poor child wounded him to the heart. The souvenirs of the past rose before him and passed in sad procession. Then the morrow would show him the crushed daughter with her mother—and such a mother! Mortally stricken in all her best illusions, in all her dearest beliefs, in all connected with the happiness of life!

He found that he still had in his heart lively feelings of pity; still some remorse in his conscience.

This weakness irritated him, and he denounced it to himself. Who had betrayed him? This question agitated him to an equal degree; but from the first instant he had not been deceived in this matter.

The sudden grief and half-crazed conviction of his wife, her despairing attitude and her silence, could only be explained by strong assurance and certain revelation. After turning the matter over and over in his own mind, he arrived at the conclusion that nothing could have thrown such clear light into his life save the letters of Madame de Campvallon.

He never wrote the Marquise, but could not prevent her writing to him; for to her, as to all women, love without letters was incomplete.

But the fault of the Count—inexcusable in a man of his tact—was in preserving these letters. No one, however, is perfect, and he was an artist. He delighted in these *chefs-d'œuvre* of passionate eloquence, was proud of inspiring them, and could not make up his mind to burn or destroy them. He examined at once the secret drawer where he had concealed them and, by certain signs, discovered the lock had been tampered with. Nevertheless no letter was missing; the arrangement of them alone had been disturbed.

His suspicions at once reverted to Vautrot, whose scruples he suspected were slight; and in the morning they were confirmed beyond doubt by a letter from the secretary. In fact Vautrot, after passing on his part a most wretched night, did not feel his nerves equal in

the morning to meeting the reception the Count possibly had in waiting for him. His letter was skilfully penned to put suspicion to sleep if it had not been fully roused, and if the Countess had not betrayed him.

It announced his acceptance of a lucrative situation suddenly offered him in a commercial house in London. He was obliged to decide at once, and to sail that same morning for fear of losing an opportunity which could not occur again. It concluded with expressions of the liveliest gratitude and regret.

Camors could not reach his secretary to strangle him; so he resolved to pay him. He not only sent him all arrears of salary, but a large sum in addition as a testimonial of his sympathy and good wishes.

This, however, was a simple precaution; for the Count apprehended nothing more from the venomous reptile so far beneath him, after he had once shaken it off. Seeing him deprived of the only weapon he could use against him, he felt safe. Besides, he had lost the only interest he could desire to subserve, for he knew M. Vautrot had done him the compliment of courting his wife.

And he really esteemed him a little less low, after discovering this gentlemanly taste!

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE GLEAM OF HOPE

IT required on the part of M. de Camors, this morning, an exertion of all his courage to perform his duty as a gentleman in going to receive Madame de Tècle at the station. But courage had been for some time past his sole remaining virtue; and this at least he sought never to lose. He received, then, most gracefully his mother-in-law, robed in her mourning attire. She was surprised at not seeing her daughter with him. He informed her that she had been a little indisposed since the preceding evening. Notwithstanding the precautions he took in his language and by his smile, he could not prevent Madame de Tècle from feeling a lively alarm.

He did not pretend, however, entirely to reassure her. Under his reserved and measured replies, she felt the presentiment of some disaster. After first pressing him with many questions, she kept silent during the rest of the drive.

The young Countess, to spare her mother the first shock, had quitted her bed; and the poor child had even put a little rouge on her pale cheeks. M. de Camors himself opened for Madame de Tècle the door of her daughter's chamber, and then withdrew.

The young woman raised herself with difficulty from her couch, and her mother took her in her arms.

All that passed between them at first was a silent interchange of mutual caresses. Then the mother seated herself near her daughter, drew her head on her bosom, and looked into the depths of her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she said, sadly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing hopeless! only you must love your little Mary more than ever. Will you not?"

"Yes; but why?"

"I must not worry you; and I must not wrong myself either—you know why!"

"Yes; but I implore you, my darling, to tell me."

"Very well; I will tell you everything; but, mother, you must be brave as I am."

She buried her head lower still on her mother's breast, and recounted to her, in a low voice, without looking up once, the terrible revelation which had been made to her, and which her husband's avowal had confirmed.

Madame de Tècle did not once interrupt her during this cruel recital. She only imprinted a kiss on her hair from time to time. The young Countess, who did not dare to raise her eyes to her, as if she were ashamed of another's crime, might have imagined that she had exaggerated the gravity of her misfortune, since her mother had received the confidence with so much calmness. But the calmness of Madame de Tècle at this terrible moment was that of the martyrs; for all that could have been suffered by the Christians under the

claws of the tiger, or on the rack of the torturer, this mother was suffering at the hands of her best-beloved daughter. Her beautiful pale face—her large eyes upturned to heaven, like those that artists give to the pure victims kneeling in the Roman circus—seemed to ask God whether He really had any consolation for such torture.

When she had heard all, she summoned strength to smile at her daughter, who at last looked up to her with an expression of timid uncertainty—embracing her more tightly still.

"Well, my darling," said she, at last, "it is a great affliction, it is true. You are right, notwithstanding; there is nothing to despair of."

"Do you really believe so?"

"Certainly. There is some inconceivable mystery under all this; but be assured that the evil is not so terrible as it appears."

"My poor mother! but he has acknowledged it?"

"I am better pleased that he has acknowledged it. That proves he has yet some pride, and that some good is left in his soul. Then, too, he feels very much afflicted—he suffers as much as we. Think of that. Let us think of the future, my darling."

They clasped each other's hands, and smiled at each other to restrain the tears which filled the eyes of both. After a few minutes—"I wish much, my child," said Madame de Tècle, "to repose for half an hour; and then also I wish to arrange my toilet."

"I will conduct you to your chamber. Oh, I can walk! I feel a great deal better."

Madame de Camors took her mother's arm and conducted her as far as the door of the chamber prepared for her. On the threshold she left her.

"Be sensible," said Madame de Tècle, turning and giving her another smile.

"And you also," said the young woman, whose voice failed her.

Madame de Tècle, as soon as the door was closed, raised her clasped hands toward heaven; then, falling on her knees before the bed, she buried her head in it, and wept despairingly.

The library of M. de Camors was contiguous to this chamber. He had been walking with long strides up and down this corridor, expecting every moment to see Madame de Tècle enter. As the time passed, he sat himself down and tried to read, but his thoughts wandered. His ear eagerly caught, against his will, the slightest sounds in the house. If a foot seemed approaching him, he rose suddenly and tried to compose his countenance. When the door of the neighboring chamber was opened, his agony was redoubled. He distinguished the whispering of the two voices; then, an instant after, the dull fall of Madame de Tècle upon the carpet; then her despairing sobs. M. de Camors threw from him violently the book which he was forcing himself to read, and, placing his elbows on the bureau which was before him, held, for a long time, his pale brow tightened in his contracted hands. When the sound of sobs abated little by little, and then ceased, he breathed freer. About midday he received this note:

"If you will permit me to take my daughter to the country for a few days, I shall be grateful to you.

"ELISE DE TECLE."

He returned immediately this simple reply:

"You can do nothing of which I do not approve to-day and always. CAMORS."

Madame de Tècle, in fact, having consulted the inclination and the strength of her daughter, had determined to remove her without delay, if possible, from the impressions of the spot where she had suffered so severely from the presence of her husband, and from the unfortunate embarrassment of their situation. She desired also to meditate in solitude, in order to decide what course to take under such unexampled circumstances. Finally, she had not the courage to see M. de Camors again—if she ever could see him again—until some time had elapsed. It was not without anxiety that she awaited the reply of the Count to the request she had addressed him.

In the midst of the troubled confusion of her ideas, she believed him capable of almost anything; and she feared everything from him. The Count's note reassured her. She hastened to read it to her daughter; and both of them, like two poor lost creatures who cling to the smallest twig, remarked with pleasure the tone of respectful abandonment with which he had reposed their destinies in their own hands. He spent his whole day at the session of the Corps Législatif; and when he returned, they had departed.

Madame de Camors woke up the next morning in the

chamber where her girlhood had passed. The birds of spring were singing under her windows in the old ancestral gardens. As she recognized these friendly voices, so familiar to her infancy, her heart melted; but several hours' sleep had restored to her her natural courage. She banished the thoughts which had weakened her, rose, and went to surprise her mother at her first waking. Soon after, both of them were walking together on the terrace of lime-trees. It was near the end of April; the young, scented verdure spread itself out beneath the sunbeams; buzzing flies already swarmed in the half-opened roses, in the blue pyramids of lilacs, and in the clusters of pink clover. After a few turns made in silence in the midst of this fresh and enchanting scene, the young Countess, seeing her mother absorbed in reverie, took her hand.

"Mother," she said, "do not be sad. Here we are as formerly—both of us in our little nook. We shall be happy."

The mother looked at her, took her head and kissed her fervently on the forehead.

"You are an angel!" she said.

It must be confessed that their uncle, Des Rameures, notwithstanding the tender affection he showed them, was rather in the way. He never had liked Camors; he had accepted him as a nephew as he had accepted him for a deputy—with more of resignation than enthusiasm. His antipathy was only too well justified by the event; but it was necessary to keep him in ignorance of it. He was an excellent man; but rough and blunt. The conduct of Camors, if he had but suspected it,

would surely have urged him to some irreparable quarrel. Therefore Madame de Tècle and her daughter, in his presence, were compelled to make only half utterances, and maintain great reserve—as much as if he had been a stranger. This painful restraint would have become insupportable had not the young Countess's health, day by day, assumed a less doubtful character, and furnished them with excuses for their preoccupation, their disquiet, and their retired life.

Madame de Tècle, who reproached herself with the misfortunes of her daughter, as her own work, and who condemned herself with an unspeakable bitterness, did not cease to search, in the midst of those ruins of the past and of the present, some reparation, some refuge for the future. The first idea which presented itself to her imagination had been to separate absolutely, and at any cost, the Countess from her husband. Under the first shock of fright which the duplicity of Camors had inflicted upon her, she could not dwell without horror on the thought of replacing her child at the side of such a man. But this separation—supposing they could obtain it, through the consent of M. de Camors, or the authority of the law—would give to the public a secret scandal, and might entail redoubled catastrophes. Were it not for these consequences she would, at least, have dug between Madame de Camors and her husband an eternal abyss. Madame de Tècle did not desire this. By force of reflection she had finally seen through the character of M. de Camors in one day—not probably more favorably, but more truly. Madame de Tècle, although a stranger to all wickedness, knew the world

and knew life, and her penetrating intelligence divined yet more than she knew certainly. She then very nearly understood what species of moral monster M. de Camors was. Such as she understood him, she hoped something from him still. However, the condition of the Countess offered her some consolation in the future, which she ought not to risk depriving herself of; and God might permit that this pledge of this unfortunate union might some day reunite the severed ties.

Madame de Tècle, in communicating her reflections, her hopes, and her fears to her daughter, added: "My poor child, I have almost lost the right to give you counsel; but I tell you, were it myself I should act thus."

"Very well, mother, I shall do so," replied the young woman.

"Reflect well on it first, for the situation which you are about to accept will have much bitterness in it; but we have only a choice of evils."

At the close of this conversation, and eight days after their arrival in the country, Madame de Tècle wrote M. de Camors a letter, which she read to her daughter, who approved it.

"I understood you to say, that you would restore to your wife her liberty if she wished to resume it. She neither wishes, nor could she accept it. Her first duty is to the child which will bear your name. It does not depend on her to keep this name stainless. She prays you, then, to reserve for her a place in your house. You need not fear any trouble or any reproach from her. She and I know how to suffer in silence. Nevertheless, I supplicate you to be true to her—to spare her. Will you leave her yet a few days in peace, then recall, or come for her?"

This letter touched M. de Camors deeply. Impassive as he was, it can easily be imagined that after the departure of his wife he had not enjoyed perfect ease of mind. Uncertainty is the worst of all evils, because everything may be apprehended. Deprived entirely of all news for eight days, there was no possible catastrophe he did not fancy floating over his head. He had the haughty courage to conceal from Madame de Campvallon the event that had occurred in his house, and to leave her undisturbed while he himself was sleepless for many nights. It was by such efforts of energy and of indomitable pride that this strange man preserved within his own consciousness a proud self-esteem. The letter of Madame de Tècle came to him like a deliverance. He sent the following brief reply:

"I accept your decision with gratitude and respect. The resolution of your daughter is generous. I have yet enough of generosity left myself to comprehend this. I am forever, whether you wish it or not, her friend and yours.

"CAMORS."

A week later, having taken the precaution of announcing his intention, he arrived one evening at Madame de Tècle's.

His young wife kept her chamber. They had taken care to have no witnesses, but their meeting was less painful and less embarrassing than they apprehended.

Madame de Tècle and her daughter found in his courteous reply a gleam of nobleness which inspired them with a shadow of confidence. Above all, they were proud, and more averse to noisy scenes than wo-

men usually are. They received him coldly, then, but calmly. On his part, he displayed toward them in his looks and language a subdued seriousness and sadness, which did not lack either dignity or grace.

The conversation having dwelt for some time on the health of the Countess, turned on current news, on local incidents, and took, little by little, an easy and ordinary tone. M. de Camors, under the pretext of slight fatigue, retired as he had entered—saluting both the ladies, but without attempting to take their hands. Thus was inaugurated, between Madame de Camors and her husband, the new, singular relation which should hereafter be the only tie in their common life.

The world might easily be silenced, because M. de Camors never had been very demonstrative in public toward his wife, and his courteous but reserved manner toward her did not vary from his habitual demeanor. He remained two days at Reuilly.

Madame de Tècle vainly waited for these two days for a slight explanation, which she did not wish to demand, but which she hoped for.

What were the terrible circumstances which had overruled the will of M. de Camors, to the point of making him forget the most sacred sentiments? When her thoughts plunged into this dread mystery, they never approached the truth. M. de Camors might have committed this base action under the menace of some great danger to save the fortune, the honor, probably the life of Madame de Campvallon. This, though a poor excuse in the mother's eyes, still was an extenuation. Probably also he had in his heart, while marrying her

daughter, the resolution to break off this fatal *liaison*, which he had again resumed against his will, as often happens. On all these painful points she dwelt after the departure of M. de Camors, as she had previous to his arrival; confined to her own conjectures, when she suggested to her daughter the most consolatory appearances. It was agreed upon that Madame de Camors should remain in the country until her health was reëstablished: only her husband expressed the desire that she should reside ordinarily on his estate at Reuilly, the château on which had recently been restored with the greatest taste.

Madame de Tècle felt the propriety of this arrangement. She herself abandoned the old habitation of the Comte de Tècle, to install herself near her daughter in the modest château which belonged to the maternal ancestors of M. de Camors, and which we have already described in another place, with its solemn avenue, its balustrades of granite, its labyrinths of hornbeams and the black fishpond, shaded with poplars.

Both dwelt there in the midst of their sweetest and most pleasant souvenirs; for this little château, so long deserted—the neglected woods which surrounded it—the melancholy piece of water—the solitary nymph—all this had been their particular domain, the favorite framework of their reveries, the legend of their infancy, the poetry of their youth. It was doubtless a great grief to revisit again, with tearful eyes and wounded hearts and heads bowed by the storms of life, the familiar paths where they once knew happiness and peace. But, nevertheless, all these dear confidants of past joys, of

blasted hopes, of vanished dreams—if they are mournful witnesses they are also friends. We love them; and they seem to love us. Thus these two poor women, straying amid these woods, these waters, these solitudes, bearing with them their incurable wounds, fancied they heard voices which pitied them and breathed a healing sympathy. The most cruel trial reserved to Madame de Camors in the life which she had the courage and judgment to adopt, was assuredly the duty of again seeing the Marquise de Campvallon, and preserving with her such relations as might blind the eyes of the General and of the world.

She resigned herself even to this; but she desired to defer as long as possible the pain of such a meeting. Her health supplied her with a natural excuse for not going, during that summer, to Campvallon, and also for keeping herself confined to her own room the day the Marquise visited Reuilly, accompanied by the General.

Madame de Tècle received her with her usual kindness. Madame de Campvallon, whom M. de Camors had already warned, did not trouble herself much; for the best women, like the worst, excel in comedy, and everything passed off without the General having conceived the shadow of a suspicion.

The fine season had passed. M. de Camors had visited the country several times, strengthening at every interview the new tone of his relations with his wife. He remained at Reuilly, as was his custom, during the month of August; and under the pretext of the health of the Countess, did not multiply his visits that

year to Campvallon. On his return to Paris, he resumed his old habits, and also his careless egotism, for he recovered little by little from the blow he had received. He began to forget his sufferings and those of his wife; and even to felicitate himself secretly on the turn that chance had given to her situation. He had obtained the advantage and had no longer any annoyance. His wife had been enlightened, and he no longer deceived her—which was a comfortable thing for him. As for her, she would soon be a mother, she would have a plaything, a consolation; and he designed redoubling his attentions and regards to her.

She would be happy, or nearly so;—as much so as two thirds of the women in the world.

Everything was for the best. He gave anew the reins to his car and launched himself afresh on his brilliant career—proud of his royal mistress, and foreseeing in the distance, to crown his life, the triumphs of ambition and power. Pleading various doubtful engagements, he went to Reuilly only once during the autumn; but he wrote frequently, and Madame de Tècle sent him in return brief accounts of his wife's health.

One morning toward the close of November, he received a despatch which made him understand, in telegraphic style, that his presence was immediately required at Reuilly, if he wished to be present at the birth of his son.

Whenever social duties or courtesy were required of M. de Camors, he never hesitated. Seeing he had not a moment to spare if he wished to catch the train which left that morning, he jumped into a cab and drove to

the station. His servant would join him the next morning.

The station at Reuilly was several miles distant from the house. In the confusion no arrangement had been made to receive him on his arrival, and he was obliged to content himself with making the intermediate journey in a heavy country-wagon. The bad condition of the roads was a new obstacle, and it was three o'clock in the morning when the Count, impatient and travel-worn, jumped out of the little cart before the railings of his avenue. He strode toward the house under the dark and silent dome of the tufted elms. He was in the middle of the avenue when a sharp cry rent the air. His heart bounded in his breast: he suddenly stopped and listened attentively. The cry echoed through the stillness of the night. One would have deemed it the despairing shriek of a human being under the knife of a murderer.

These dolorous sounds gradually ceasing, he continued his walk with greater haste, and only heard the hollow and muffled sound of his own beating heart. At the moment he saw the lights of the château, another agonized cry, more shrill and alarming than the first, arose.

This time Camors stopped. Notwithstanding that the natural explanation of these agonized cries presented itself to his mind, he was troubled.

It is not unusual that men like him, accustomed to a purely artificial life, feel a strange surprise when one of the simplest laws of nature presents itself all at once before them with a violence as imperious and irresistible

as a divine law. Camors soon reached the house, and receiving some information from the servants, notified Madame de Tècle of his arrival. Madame de Tècle immediately descended from her daughter's room. On seeing her convulsed features and streaming eyes, "Are you alarmed?" Camors asked, quickly.

"Alarmed? No," she replied; "but she suffers much, and it is very long."

"Can I see her?"

There was a moment's silence.

Madame de Tècle, whose forehead was contracted, lowered her eyes, then raised them. "If you insist on it," she said.

"I insist on nothing! If you believe my presence would do her harm—" The voice of Camors was not as steady as usual.

"I am afraid," replied Madame de Tècle, "that it would agitate her greatly; and if you will have confidence in me, I shall be much obliged to you."

"But at least," said Camors, "she might probably be glad to know that I have come, and that I am here —that I have not abandoned her."

"I shall tell her."

"It is well." He saluted Madame de Tècle with a slight movement of his head, and turned away immediately.

He entered the garden at the back of the house, and walked abstractedly from alley to alley. We know that generally the *rôle* of men in the situation in which M. de Camors at this moment was placed is not very easy or very glorious; but the common annoyance of this

position was particularly aggravated to him by painful reflections. Not only was his assistance not needed, but it was repelled; not only was he far from a support —on the contrary, he was but an additional danger and sorrow. In this thought was a bitterness which he keenly felt. His native generosity, his humanity, shuddered as he heard the terrible cries and accents of distress which succeeded each other without intermission. He passed some heavy hours in the damp garden this cold night, and the chilly morning which succeeded it. Madame de Tècle came frequently to give him the news. Near eight o'clock he saw her approach him with a grave and tranquil air.

"Monsieur," she said, "it is a boy."

"I thank you. How is she?"

"Well. I shall request you to go and see her shortly."

Half an hour later she reappeared on the threshold of the vestibule, and called:

"Monsieur de Camors!" and when he approached her, she added, with an emotion which made her lips tremble:

"She has been uneasy for some time past. She is afraid that you have kept terms with her in order to take the child. If ever you have such a thought—not now, Monsieur. Have you?"

"You are severe, Madame," he replied in a hoarse voice.

She breathed a sigh.

"Come!" she said, and led the way upstairs. She opened the door of the chamber and permitted him to enter it alone.

His first glance caught the eyes of his young wife fixed upon him. She was half sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, and whiter than the curtains whose shadow enveloped her. She held clasped to her breast her sleeping infant, which was already covered, like its mother, with lace and pink ribbons. From the depths of this nest she fixed on her husband her large eyes, sparkling with a kind of savage light—an expression in which the sentiment of triumph was blended with one of profound terror. He stopped within a few feet of the bed, and saluted her with his most winning smile.

"I have pitied you very much, Marie," he said.

"I thank you!" she replied, in a voice as feeble as a sigh.

She continued to regard him with the same suppliant and affrighted air.

"Are you a little happier now?" he continued.

The glittering eye of the young woman was fastened on the calm face of her infant. Then turning toward Camors——

"You will not take him from me?"

"Never!" he replied.

As he pronounced these words his eyes were suddenly dimmed, and he was astonished himself to feel a tear trickling down his cheek. He experienced a singular feeling, he bent over, seized the folds of the sheet, raised them to his lips, rose immediately and left the room.

In this terrible struggle, too often victorious against nature and truth, the man was for once vanquished. But it would be idle to imagine that a character of this tem-

perament and of this obduracy could transform itself, or could be materially modified under the stroke of a few transitory emotions, or of a few nervous shocks. M. de Camors rallied quickly from his weakness, if even he did not repent it. He spent eight days at Reuilly, remarking in the countenance of Madame de Tècle and in her manner toward him, more ease than formerly.

On his return to Paris, with thoughtful care he made some changes in the interior arrangement of his mansion. This was to prepare for the Countess and her son, who were to join him a few weeks later, larger and more comfortable apartments, in which they were to be installed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REPTILE TURNS TO STING

HEN Madame de Camors came to Paris and entered the home of her husband, she there experienced the painful impressions of the past, and the sombre preoccupations of the future; but she brought with her, although in a fragile form, a powerful consolation.

Assailed by grief, and ever menaced by new emotion she was obliged to renounce the nursing of her child; but, nevertheless, she never left him, for she was jealous even of his nurse. She at least wished to be loved by him. She loved him with an infinite passion. She loved him because he was her own son and of her blood. He was the price of her misfortune—of her pain. She loved him because he was her only hope of human happiness hereafter. She loved him because she found him as beautiful as the day. And it was true he was so; for he resembled his father—and she loved him also on that account. She tried to concentrate her heart and all her thoughts on this dear creature, and at first she thought she had succeeded. She was surprised at herself, at her own tranquillity, when she saw Madame de Campvallon; for her lively imagination had exhausted,

in advance, all the sadness which her new existence could contain; but when she had lost the kind of torpor into which excessive suffering had plunged her—when her maternal sensations were a little quieted by custom, her woman's heart recovered itself in the mother's. She could not prevent herself from renewing her passionate interest in her graceful though terrible husband.

Madame de Tècle went to pass two months with her daughter in Paris, and then returned to the country.

Madame de Camors wrote to her, in the beginning of the following spring, a letter which gave her an exact idea of the sentiments of the young woman at the time, and of the turn her domestic life had taken. After a long and touching detail of the health and beauty of her son Robert, she added:

"His father is always to me what you have seen him. He spares me everything he can spare me, but evidently the fatality he has obeyed continues under the same form. Notwithstanding, I do not despair of the future, my beloved mother. Since I saw that tear in his eye, confidence has entered my poor heart. Be assured, my adored mother, that he will love me one day, if it is only through our child, whom he begins quietly to love without himself perceiving it. At first, as you remember, this infant was no more to him than I was. When he surprised him on my knee, he would give him a cold kiss, say, 'Good-morning, Monsieur,' and withdraw. It is just one month—I have forgotten the date—it was, 'Good-morning, my son—how pretty you are!' You see the progress; and do you know, finally, what passed yesterday? I entered Robert's room noiselessly; the door was open—what did I behold, my mother! Monsieur de Camors, with his head resting on the pillow of the cradle, and laughing at this little creature, who smiled back at him! I assure you, he blushed and excused him-

self: 'The door was open,' he said, 'and I came in.' I assured him that he had done nothing wrong.

"Monsieur de Camors is very odd sometimes. He occasionally passes the limits which were agreed upon as necessary. He is not only polite, but takes great trouble. Alas! once these courtesies would have fallen upon my heart like roses from heaven—now they annoy me a little. Last evening, for example, I sat down, as is my custom, at my piano after dinner, he reading a journal at the chimney-corner—his usual hour for going out passed. Behold me, much surprised. I threw a furtive glance, between two bars of music, at him: he was not reading, he was not sleeping—he was dreaming. 'Is there anything new in the *Journal*?'—'No, no; nothing at all.' Another two or three bars of music, and I entered my son's room. He was in bed and asleep. I devoured him with kisses and returned—Monsieur de Camors was still there. And now, surprise after surprise: 'Have you heard from your mother? What does she say? Have you seen Madame Jaubert? Have you read this review?' Just like one who sought to open a conversation. Once I would willingly have paid with my blood for one of these evenings, and now he offers them to me, when I know not what to do with them. Notwithstanding I remember the advice of my mother, I do not wish to discourage these symptoms. I adopt a festive manner. I light four extra wax-lights. I try to be amiable without being coquettish; for coquetry here would be shameful—would it not, my dear mother? Finally, we chatted together; he sang two airs to the piano; I played two others; he painted the design of a little Russian costume for Robert to wear next year; then talked politics to me. This enchanted me. He explained to me his situation in the Chamber. Midnight arrived; I became remarkably silent; he rose: 'May I press your hand in friendship?'—'*Mon Dieu!* yes.' 'Good-night, Marie.'—'Good-night.' Yes, my mother, I read your thoughts. There is danger here! but you have shown it to me; and I believe also, I should have perceived it by myself. Do not fear, then. I shall be happy at his good inclinations, and shall encourage them to the best of my power; but I shall not be in haste to perceive a return, on his

part, toward virtue and myself. I see here in society arrangements which revolt me. In the midst of my misfortune I remain pure and proud; but I should fall into the deepest contempt of myself if I should ever permit myself to be a plaything for Monsieur de Camors. A man so fallen does not raise himself in a day. If ever he really returns to me, it will be necessary for me to have much proof. I never have ceased to love him, and probably he doubts it: but he will learn that if this sad love can break my heart it can never abase it; and it is unnecessary to tell my mother that I shall live and die courageously in my widow's robe.

"There are other symptoms which also strike me. He is more attentive to me when *she* is present. This may probably be arranged between them, but I doubt it. The other evening we were at the General's. She was waltzing, and Monsieur de Camors, as a rare favor, came and seated himself at your daughter's side. In passing before us she threw him a look—a flash. I felt the flame. Her blue eyes glared ferociously. He perceived it. I have not assuredly much tenderness for her. She is my most cruel enemy; but if ever she suffers what she has made me suffer—yes, I believe I shall pity her. My mother, I embrace you. I embrace our dear lime-trees. I taste their young leaves as in olden times. Scold me as in old times, and love, above all things, as in old times, your MARIE."

This wise young woman, matured by misfortune, observed everything—saw everything—and exaggerated nothing. She touched, in this letter, on the most delicate points in the household of M. de Camors—and even of his secret thoughts—with accurate justice. For Camors was not at all converted, nor near being so; but it would be belying human nature to attribute to his heart, or that of any other human being, a supernatural impassibility. If the dark and implacable theories which M. de Camors had made the law of his

existence could triumph absolutely, this would be true. The trials he had passed through did not reform him, they only staggered him. He did not pursue his paths with the same firmness; he strayed from his programme. He pitied one of his victims, and, as one wrong always entails another, after pitying his wife, he came near loving his child. These two weaknesses had glided into his petrified soul as into a marble fount, and there took root—two imperceptible roots, however. The child occupied him not more than a few moments every day. He thought of him, however, and would return home a little earlier than usual each day than was his habit, secretly attracted by the smile of that fresh face. The mother was for him something more. Her sufferings, her youthful heroism had touched him. She became somebody in his eyes. He discovered many merits in her. He perceived she was remarkably well-informed for a woman, and prodigiously so for a French woman. She understood half a word—knew a great deal—and guessed at the remainder. She had, in short, that blending of grace and solidity which gives to the conversation of a woman of cultivated mind an incomparable charm. Habituated from infancy to her mental superiority as to her pretty face, she carried the one as unconsciously as the other. She devoted herself to the care of his household as if she had no idea beyond it. There were domestic details which she would not confide to servants. She followed them into her salons, into her boudoirs, a blue feather-brush in hand, lightly dusting the *étagères*, the *jardinières*, the *consoles*. She arranged one piece of furniture and removed an-

other, put flowers in a vase—gliding about and singing like a bird in a cage.

Her husband sometimes amused himself in following her with his eye in these household occupations. She reminded him of the princesses one sees in the ballet of the opera, reduced by some change of fortune to a temporary servitude, who dance while putting the house in order.

"How you love order, Marie!" said he to her one day.

"Order" she said, gravely, "is the moral beauty of things."

She emphasized the word things—and, fearing she might be considered pretentious, she blushed.

She was a lovable creature, and it can be understood that she might have many attractions, even for her husband. Yet though he had not for one instant the idea of sacrificing to her the passion that ruled his life, it is certain, however, that his wife pleased him as a charming friend, which she was, and probably as a charming forbidden fruit, which she also was. Two or three years passed without making any sensible change in the relations of the different persons in this history. This was the most brilliant phase and probably the happiest in the life of M. de Camors.

His marriage had doubled his fortune, and his clever speculations augmented it every day. He had increased the retinue of his house in proportion to his new resources. In the region of elegant high life he decidedly held the sceptre. His horses, his equipages, his artistic tastes, even his toilet, set the law.

His *liaison* with Madame de Campvallon, without being proclaimed, was suspected, and completed his prestige. At the same time his capacity as a political man began to be acknowledged. He had spoken in some recent debate, and his maiden speech was a triumph. His prosperity was great. It was nevertheless true that M. de Camors did not enjoy it without trouble. Two black spots darkened the sky above his head, and might contain destroying thunder. His life was eternally suspended on a thread.

Any day General Campvallon might be informed of the intrigue which dishonored him, either through some selfish treason, or through some public rumor, which might begin to spread. Should this ever happen, he knew the General never would submit to it; and he had determined never to defend his life against his outraged friend.

This resolve, firmly decided upon in his secret soul, gave him the last solace to his conscience. All his future destiny was thus at the mercy of an accident most likely to happen. The second cause of his disquietude was the jealous hatred of Madame Campvallon toward the young rival she had herself selected. After jesting freely on this subject at first, the Marquise had, little by little, ceased even to allude to it.

M. de Camors could not misunderstand certain mute symptoms, and was sometimes alarmed at this silent jealousy. Fearing to exasperate this most violent feminine sentiment in so strong a soul, he was compelled day by day to resort to tricks which wounded his pride,

and probably his heart also; for his wife, to whom his new conduct was inexplicable, suffered intensely, and he saw it.

One evening in the month of May, 1860, there was a reception at the Hôtel Campvallon. The Marquise, before leaving for the country, was making her adieus to a choice group of her friends. Although this *fête* professed to be but an informal gathering, she had organized it with her usual elegance and taste. A kind of gallery, composed of verdure and of flowers, connected the salon with the conservatory at the other end of the garden.

This evening proved a very painful one to the Comtesse de Camors. Her husband's neglect of her was so marked, his assiduities to the Marquise so persistent, their mutual understanding so apparent, that the young wife felt the pain of her desertion to an almost insupportable degree. She took refuge in the conservatory, and finding herself alone there, she wept.

A few moments later, M. de Camors, not seeing her in the salon, became uneasy. She saw him, as he entered the conservatory, in one of those instantaneous glances by which women contrive to see without looking. She pretended to be examining the flowers, and by a strong effort of will dried her tears. Her husband advanced slowly toward her.

"What a magnificent camellia!" he said to her. "Do you know this variety?"

"Very well," she replied; "this is the camellia that weeps."

He broke off the flowers.

"Marie," he said, "I never have been much addicted to sentimentality, but this flower I shall keep."

She turned upon him her astonished eyes.

"Because I love it," he added.

The noise of a step made them both turn. It was Madame de Campvallon, who was crossing the conservatory on the arm of a foreign diplomat.

"Pardon me," she said, smiling; "I have disturbed you! How awkward of me!" and she passed out.

Madame de Camors suddenly grew very red, and her husband very pale. The diplomat alone did not change color, for he comprehended nothing. The young Countess, under pretext of a headache, which her face did not belie, returned home immediately, promising her husband to send back the carriage for him. Shortly after, the Marquise de Campvallon, obeying a secret sign from M. de Camors, rejoined him in the retired boudoir, which recalled to them both the most culpable incident of their lives. She sat down beside him on the divan with a haughty nonchalance.

"What is it?" she said.

"Why do you watch me?" asked Camors. "It is unworthy of you!"

"Ah! an explanation? a disagreeable thing. It is the first between us—at least let us be quick and complete."

She spoke in a voice of restrained passion—her eyes fixed on her foot, which she twisted in her satin shoe.

"Well, tell the truth," she said. "You are in love with your wife."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Unworthy of you, I repeat."

"What, then, mean these delicate attentions to her?"

"You ordered me to marry her, but not to kill her, I suppose?"

She made a strange movement of her eyebrows, which he did not see, for neither of them looked at the other. After a pause she said:

"She has her son! She has her mother! I have no one but you. Hear me, my friend; do not make me jealous, for when I am so, ideas torment me which terrify even myself. Wait an instant. Since we are on this subject, if you love her, tell me so. You know me—you know I am not fond of petty artifices. Well, I fear so much the sufferings and humiliations of which I have a presentiment, I am so much afraid of myself, that I offer you, and give you, your liberty. I prefer this horrible grief, for it is at least open and noble! It is no snare that I set for you, believe me! Look at me. I seldom weep." The dark blue of her eyes was bathed in tears. "Yes, I am sincere; and I beg of you, if it is so, profit by this moment, for if you let it escape, you never will find it again."

M. de Camors was little prepared for this decided proposal. The idea of breaking off his *liaison* with the Marquise never had entered his mind. This *liaison* seemed to him very reconcilable with the sentiments with which his wife could inspire him.

It was at the same time the greatest wickedness and the perpetual danger of his life, but it was also the excitement, the pride, and the magnificent voluptuous-

ness of it. He shuddered. The idea of losing the love which had cost him so dear exasperated him. He cast a burning glance on this beautiful face, refined and exalted as that of a warring archangel.

"My life is yours," he said. "How could you have dreamed of breaking ties like ours? How could you have alarmed yourself, or even thought of my feelings toward another? I do what honor and humanity command me—nothing more. As for you—I love you—understand that."

"Is it true?" she asked. "It is true! I believe you!"

She took his hand, and gazed at him a moment without speaking—her eye dimmed, her bosom palpitating; then suddenly rising, she said, "My friend, you know I have guests!" and saluting him with a smile, left the boudoir.

This scene, however, left a disagreeable impression on the mind of Camors. He thought of it impatiently the next morning, while trying a horse on the Champs Elysées—when he suddenly found himself face to face with his former secretary, Vautrot. He had never seen this person since the day he had thought proper to give himself his own dismissal.

The Champs Elysées was deserted at this hour. Vautrot could not avoid, as he had probably done more than once, encountering Camors.

Seeing himself recognized he saluted him and stopped, with an uneasy smile on his lips. His worn black coat and doubtful linen showed a poverty unacknowledged but profound. M. de Camors did not notice these details, or his natural generosity would have

awakened, and curbed the sudden indignation that took possession of him.

He reined in his horse sharply.

"Ah, is it you, Monsieur Vautrot?" he said. "You have left England then! What are you doing now?"

"I am looking for a situation, Monsieur de Camors," said Vautrot, humbly, who knew his old patron too well not to read clearly in the curl of his moustache the warning of a storm.

"And why," said Camors, "do you not return to your trade of locksmith? You were so skilful at it! The most complicated locks had no secrets for you."

"I do not understand your meaning," murmured Vautrot.

"Droll fellow!" and throwing out these words with an accent of withering scorn, M. de Camors struck Vautrot's shoulder lightly with the end of his riding-whip, and tranquilly passed on at a walk.

Vautrot was truly in search of a place, had he consented to accept one fitted to his talents; but he was, as will be remembered, one of those whose vanity was greater than his merits, and one who loved an office better than work.

CHAPTER XX

THE SECOND ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

VAUTROT had at this time fallen into the depth of want and distress, which, if aggravated, would prompt him to evil and even to crime. There are many examples of the extremes to which this kind of intelligence, at once ambitious, grasping, yet impotent, can transport its possessor. Vautrot, in awaiting better times, had relapsed into his old *rôle* of hypocrite, in which he had formerly succeeded so well. Only the evening before he had returned to the house of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and made honorable amends for his philosophical heresies; for he was like the Saxons in the time of Charlemagne, who asked to be baptized every time they wanted new tunics. Madame de la Roche-Jugan had given a kind reception to this sad prodigal son, but she chilled perceptibly on seeing him more discreet than she desired on certain subjects, the mystery of which she had set her heart upon unravelling.

She was now more preoccupied than ever about the relations which she suspected to exist between M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallon. These relations could not but prove fatal to the hopes she had so long

founded on the widowhood of the Marquise and the heritage of the General. The marriage of M. de Camors had for the moment deceived her, but she was one of those pious persons who always think evil, and whose suspicions are soon reawakened. She tried to obtain from Vautrot, who had so long been intimate with her nephew, some explanation of the mystery; but as Vautrot was too prudent to enlighten her, she turned him out of doors.

After his encounter with M. de Camors, he immediately turned his steps toward the Rue St. Dominique, and an hour later Madame de la Roche-Jugan had the pleasure of knowing all that he knew of the *liaison* between the Count and the Marquise. But we remember that he knew everything. These revelations, though not unexpected, terrified Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who saw her maternal projects destroyed forever. To her bitter feeling at this deception was immediately joined, in this base soul, a sudden thirst for revenge. It was true she had been badly recompensed for her anonymous letter, by which she had previously attempted to open the eyes of the unfortunate General; for from that moment the General, the Marquise, and M. de Camors himself, without an open rupture, let her feel their marks of contempt, which embittered her heart. She never would again expose herself to a similar slight of this kind; but she must assuredly, in the cause of good morals, at once confront the blind with the culpable, and this time with such proofs as would make the blow irresistible. By the mere thought, Madame de la Roche-Jugan had persuaded herself that the

new turn events were taking might become favorable to the expectations which had become the fixed idea of her life.

Madame de Campvallon destroyed, M. de Camors set aside, the General would be alone in the world; and it was natural to suppose he would turn to his young relative Sigismund, if only to recognize the far-sighted affection and wounded heart of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

The General, in fact, had by his marriage contract settled all his property on his wife; but Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had consulted a lawyer on this question, knew that he had the power of alienating his fortune during life, and of stripping his unworthy wife and transferring it to Sigismund.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan did not shrink from the probability—which was most likely—of an encounter between the General and Camors. Every one knows the disdainful intrepidity of women in the matter of duels. She had no scruple, therefore, in engaging Vautrot in the meritorious work she meditated. She secured him by some immediate advantages and by promises; she made him believe the General would recompense him largely. Vautrot, smarting still from the cut of Camors's whip on his shoulder, and ready to kill him with his own hand had he dared, hardly required the additional stimulus of gain to aid his protectress in her vengeance by acting as her instrument.

He resolved, however, since he had the opportunity, to put himself, once for all, beyond misery and want, by cleverly speculating, through the secret he held, on

the great fortune of the General. This secret he had already given to Madame de Camors under the inspiration of another sentiment, but he had then in his hands the proofs, which he now was without.

It was necessary, then, for him to arm himself with new and infallible proofs; but if the intrigue he was required to unmask still existed, he did not despair of detecting something certain, aided by the general knowledge he had of the private habits and ways of Camors. This was the task to which he applied himself from this moment, day and night, with an evil ardor of hate and jealousy. The absolute confidence which the General reposed in his wife and Camors after the latter's marriage with Marie de Tècle, had doubtless allowed them to dispense with much of the mystery and adventure of their intrigue; but that which was ardent, poetic, and theatrical to the Marquise's imagination had not been lost. Love alone was not sufficient for her. She needed danger, scenic effect, and pleasure heightened by terror. Once or twice, in the early time, she was reckless enough to leave her house during the night and to return before day. But she was obliged to renounce these audacious flights, finding them too perilous.

These nocturnal interviews with M. de Camors were rare, and she had usually received him at home. This was their arrangement: An open space, sometimes used as a wood-yard, was next the garden of the Hôtel Campvallon. The General had purchased a portion of it and had had a cottage erected in the midst of a kitchen-garden, and had placed in it, with his usual

kind-heartedness, an old *sous-officier*, named Mesnil, who had served under him in the artillery. This Mesnil enjoyed his master's confidence. He was a kind of forester on the property; he lived in Paris in the winter, but occasionally passed two or three days in the country whenever the General wished to obtain information about the crops. Madame de Campvallon and M. de Camors chose the time of these absences for their dangerous interviews at night. Camors, apprised from within by some understood signal, entered the enclosure surrounding the cottage of Mesnil, and thence proceeded to the garden belonging to the house. Madame de Campvallon always charged herself with the peril that charmed her—with keeping open one of the windows on the ground floor. The Parisian custom of lodging the domestics in the attics gave to this hardihood a sort of security, notwithstanding its being always hazardous. Near the end of May, one of these occasions, always impatiently awaited on both sides, presented itself, and M. de Camors at midnight penetrated into the little garden of the old *sous-officier*. At the moment when he turned the key in the gate of the enclosure, he thought he heard a slight sound behind him. He turned, cast a rapid glance over the dark space that surrounded him, and thinking himself mistaken, entered. An instant after, the shadow of a man appeared at the angle of a pile of lumber, which was scattered over the carpenter's yard. This shadow remained for some time immovable in front of the windows of the hotel and then plunged again into the darkness.

The following week M. de Camors was at the club

one evening, playing whist with the General. He remarked that the General was not playing his usual game, and saw also imprinted on his features a painful preoccupation.

"Are you in pain, General?" said he, after they had finished their game.

"No, no!" said the General; "I am only annoyed—a tiresome affair between two of my people in the country. I sent Mesnil away this morning to examine into it."

The General took a few steps, then returned to Camors and took him aside: "My friend," he said, "I deceived you, just now; I have something on my mind—something very serious. I am even very unhappy!"

"What is the matter?" said Camors, whose heart sank.

"I shall tell you that probably to-morrow. Come, in any case, to see me to-morrow morning. Won't you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Thanks! Now I shall go—for I am really not well."

He clasped his hand more affectionately than usual.

"Adieu, my dear child," he added, and turned around brusquely to hide the tears which suddenly filled his eyes. M. de Camors experienced for some moments a lively disquietude, but the friendly and tender adieus of the General reassured him that it did not relate to himself. Still he continued astonished and even affected by the emotion of the old man.

Was it not strange? If there was one man in the

world whom he loved, or to whom he would have devoted himself, it was this one whom he had mortally wronged.

He had, however, good reason to be uneasy; and was wrong in reassuring himself; for the General in the course of that evening had been informed of the treachery of his wife—at least he had been prepared for it. Only he was still ignorant of the name of her accomplice.

Those who informed him were afraid of encountering the blind and obstinate faith of the General, had they named Camors.

It was probable, also, after what had already occurred, that had they again pronounced that name, the General would have repelled the suspicion as a monstrous impossibility, regretting even the thought.

M. de Camors remained until one o'clock at the club and then went to the Rue Vanneau. He was introduced into the Hôtel Campvallon with the customary precautions; and this time we shall follow him there. In traversing the garden, he raised his eyes to the General's window, and saw the soft light of the night-lamp burning behind the blinds.

The Marquise awaited him at the door of her boudoir, which opened on a rotunda at an elevation of a few feet. He kissed her hand, and told her in few words of the General's sadness.

She replied that she had been very uneasy about his health for some days. This explanation seemed natural to M. de Camors, and he followed the Marquise through the dark and silent salon. She held in her

hand a candle, the feeble light of which threw on her delicate features a strange pallor. When they passed up the long, echoing staircase, the rustling of her skirt on the steps was the only sound that betrayed her light movement.

She stopped from time to time, shivering—as if better to taste the dramatic solemnity that surrounded them—turned her blonde head a little to look at Camors; then cast on him her inspiring smile, placed her hand on her heart, as if to say, "I am fearful," and went on. They reached her chamber, where a dim lamp faintly illumined the sombre magnificence, the sculptured wainscotings, and the heavy draperies.

The flame on the hearth which flickered up at intervals, threw a bright gleam on two or three pictures of the Spanish school, which were the only decorations of this sumptuous, but stern-looking apartment.

The Marquise sank as if terrified on a divan near the chimney, and pushed with her feet two cushions before her, on which Camors half reclined; she then thrust back the thick braids of her hair, and leaned toward her lover.

"Do you love me to-day?" she asked.

The soft breath of her voice was passing over the face of Camors, when the door suddenly opened before them. The General entered. The Marquise and Camors instantly rose to their feet, and standing side by side, motionless, gazed upon him. The General paused near the door. As he saw them a shudder passed over his frame, and his face assumed a livid pallor. For an instant his eye rested on Camors with

a stupefied surprise and almost bewilderment; then he raised his arms over his head, and his hands struck together with a sharp sound. At this terrible moment Madame de Campvallon seized the arm of Camors, and threw him a look so profound, supplicating, and tragic, that it alarmed him.

He roughly pushed her from him, crossed his arms, and waited the result.

The General walked slowly toward him. Suddenly his face became inflamed with a purple hue; his lips half opened, as if about to deliver some deadly insult. He advanced rapidly, his hand raised; but after a few steps the old man suddenly stopped, beat the air with both hands, as if seeking some support, then staggered and fell forward, striking his head against the marble mantelpiece, rolled on the carpet, and remained motionless. There was an ominous silence. A stifled cry from M. de Camors broke it. At the same time he threw himself on his knees by the side of the motionless old man, touched first his hand, then his heart. He saw that he was dead. A thin thread of blood trickled down his pale forehead where it had struck the marble; but this was only a slight wound. It was not that which had killed him. It was the treachery of those two beings whom he had loved, and who, he believed, loved him. His heart had been broken by the violence of the surprise, the grief, and the horror.

One look of Camors told Madame de Campvallon she was a widow. She threw herself on the divan, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed aloud. Camors still stood, his back against the mantelpiece,

his eyes fixed, wrapped in his own thoughts. He wished in all sincerity of heart that he could have awakened the dead and restored him to life. He had sworn to deliver himself up to him without defence, if ever the old man demanded it of him for forgotten favors, betrayed friendship, and violated honor. Now he had killed him. If he had not slain him with his own hand, the crime was still there, in its most hideous form. He saw it before him, he inhaled its odor—he breathed its blood. An uneasy glance of the Marquise recalled him to himself and he approached her. They then conversed together in whispers, and he hastily explained to her the line of conduct she should adopt.

She must summon the servants, say the General had been taken suddenly ill, and that on entering her room he had been seized by an apoplectic stroke.

It was with some effort that she understood she was to wait long enough before giving the alarm to give Camors sufficient time to escape; and until then she was to remain in this frightful *tête-à-tête*, alone with the dead.

He pitied her, and decided on leaving the hotel by the apartment of M. de Campvallon, which had a private entrance on the street.

The Marquise immediately rang violently several times, and Camors did not retire till he heard the sound of hastening feet on the stairs. The apartment of the General communicated with that of his wife by a short gallery. There was a suite of apartments—first a study, then his sleeping-room. M. de Camors traversed this room with feelings we shall not attempt

to describe and gained the street. The surgeon testified that the General had died from the rupture of a vessel in the heart. Two days after the interment took place, at which M. de Camors attended. The same evening he left Paris to join his wife, who had gone to Reuilly the preceding week.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FEATHER IN THE BALANCE

NE of the sweetest sensations in the world is that of a man who has just escaped the fantastic terrors of nightmare; and who, awaking, his forehead bathed with icy sweat, says to himself, "It was only a dream!" This was, in some degree, the impression which Camors felt on awaking, the morning after his arrival at Reuilly, when his first glance fell on the sunlight streaming over the foliage, and when he heard beneath his window the joyous laugh of his little son. He, however, was not dreaming; but his soul, crushed by the horrible tension of recent emotions, had a moment's respite, and drank in, almost without alloy, the new calm that surrounded him. He hastily dressed himself and descended to the garden, where his son ran to meet him.

M. de Camors embraced the child with tenderness; and leaning toward him, spoke to him in a low voice, and asked after his mother and about his amusements, with a singularly soft and sad manner. Then he let him go, and walked with a slow step, breathing the fresh morning air, examining the leaves and the flowers with extraordinary interest. From time to time a deep,

sad sigh broke from his oppressed chest; he passed his hand over his brow as if to efface the importunate images. He sat down amid the quaintly clipped box-wood which ornamented the garden in the antique fashion, called his son again to him, held him between his knees, interrogating him again, in a low voice, as he had done before; then drew him toward him and clasped him tightly for a long time, as if to draw into his own heart the innocence and peace of the child's. Madame de Camors surprised him in this gush of feeling, and remained mute with astonishment. He rose immediately and took her hand.

"How well you bring him up!" he said. "I thank you for it. He will be worthy of you and of your mother."

She was so surprised at the soft, sad tone of his voice, that she replied, stammering with embarrassment, "And worthy of you also, I hope."

"Of me?" said Camors, whose lips were slightly tremulous. "Poor child, I hope not!" and rapidly withdrew.

Madame de Camors and Madame de Tècle had learned, the previous morning, of the death of the General. The evening of the Count's arrival they did not speak to him on the subject, and were cautious not to make any allusion to it. The next day, and the succeeding ones, they practised the same reserve, though very far from suspecting the fatal circumstances which rendered this souvenir so painful to M. de Camors. They thought it only natural he should be pained at so sudden a catastrophe, and that his conscience

should be disturbed; but they were astonished when this impression prolonged itself from day to day, until it took the appearance of a lasting sentiment.

They began to believe that there had arisen between Madame de Campvallon and himself, probably occasioned by the General's death, some quarrel which had weakened the tie between them.

A journey of twenty-four hours, which he made fifteen days after his arrival, was to them a confirmation of the truth they before suspected; but his prompt return, his new tastes, which kept him at Reuilly during the summer, seemed to them favorable symptoms.

He was singularly sad, pensive, and more inactive than usual in his habits. He took long walks alone. Sometimes he took his son with him, as if by chance. He sometimes attempted a little timid tenderness with his wife; and this awkwardness, on his part, was quite touching.

"Marie," he said to her one day, "you, who are a fairy, wave your wand over Reuilly and make of it an island in mid-ocean."

"You say that because you know how to swim," said she, laughing and shaking her head; but the heart of the young woman was joyful.

"You embrace me now every moment, my little one," said Madame de Tècle to her. "Is this really all intended for me?"

"My adorable mother," while embracing her again, "I assure you he is really courting me again. Why, I am ignorant; but he is courting me and you also, my mother. Observe it!"

Madame de Tècle did observe it. In his conversation with her, M. de Camors sought, under every pretext, to recall the souvenirs of the past, common to them both. It seemed he wished to link the past with his new life; to forget the rest, and pray of them to forget it also.

It was not without fear that these two charming women abandoned themselves to their hopes. They remembered they were in the presence of an uncertain person; they little trusted a change so sudden, the reason of which they could not comprehend. They feared it was some passing caprice, which would return to them, if they were its dupes, all their misfortunes, without the dignity which had hitherto attended them.

They were not the only ones struck by this transformation. M. des Rameures remarked it to them. The neighboring country people felt in the Count's language something new—as it were, a tender humility; they said that in other years he had been polite, but this year he was angelic. Even the inanimate things, the woods, the trees, the heavens, should have borne the same testimony, for he looked at and studied them with a benevolent curiosity with which he had never before honored them.

In truth, a profound trouble had invaded him and would not leave him. More than once, before this epoch, his soul, his philosophy, his pride, had received a rude shock, but he had no less pursued his path, rising after every blow, like a lion wounded, but unconquered. In trampling under his feet all moral

belief which binds the vulgar, he had reserved honor as an inviolable limit. Then, under the empire of his passions, he said to himself that, after all, honor, like all the rest, was conventional. Then he encountered crime—he touched it with his hand—horror seized him —and he recoiled. He rejected with disgust the principle which had conducted him there—asked himself what would become of human society if it had no other.

The simple truths which he had misunderstood now appeared to him in their tranquil splendor. He could not yet distinguish them clearly; he did not try to give them a name, but he plunged with a secret delight into their shadows and their peace. He sought them in the pure heart of his child, in the pure love of his young wife, in the daily miracles of nature, in the harmonies of the heavens, and probably already in the depths of his thoughts—in God. In the midst of this approach toward a new life he hesitated. Madame de Campvallon was there. He still loved her vaguely. Above all, he could not abandon her without being guilty of a kind of baseness. Terrible struggles agitated him. Having done so much evil, would he now be permitted to do good, and gracefully partake of the joys he foresaw? These ties with the past, his fortune dishonestly acquired, his fatal mistress—the spectre of that old man —would they permit it?

And we may add, would Providence suffer it? Not that we should lightly use this word Providence, and suspend over M. de Camors a menace of supernatural chastisement. Providence does not intervene

in human events except through the logic of her eternal laws. She has only the sanction of these laws; and it is for this reason she is feared. At the end of August M. de Camors repaired to the principal town in the district, to perform his duties in the Council-General. The session finished, he paid a visit to Madame de Campvallon before returning to Reuilly. He had neglected her a little in the course of the summer, and had only visited Campvallon at long intervals, as politeness compelled him. The Marquise wished to keep him for dinner, as she had no guests with her. She pressed him so warmly that, reproaching himself all the time, he consented. He never saw her without pain. She always brought back to him those terrible memories, but also that terrible intoxication. She had never been more beautiful. Her deep mourning embellished yet more her languishing and regal grace; it made her pale complexion yet more fair, and it heightened the brilliancy of her look. She had the air of a young tragic queen, or of an allegory of Night. In the evening an hour arrived when the reserve which for some time had marked their relations was forgotten. M. de Camors found himself, as in olden time, at the feet of the young Marquise—his eyes gazing into hers, and covering with kisses her lovely hands. She was strange that evening. She looked at him with a wild tenderness, instilling, at pleasure, into his veins the poison of burning passion: then escaping him, the tears gathering in her eyes. Suddenly, by one of those magical movements of hers, she enveloped with her hands the head of her lover,

and spoke to him quite low beneath the shadow of this perfumed veil.

"We might be so happy!" she said.

"Are we not so?" said Camors.

"No! I at least am not, for you are not all mine, as I am yours. This appears harder, now that I am free. If you had remained free—when I think of it! or if you could become so, it would be heaven!"

"You know that I am not so! Why speak of it?"

She drew nearer to him, and with her breath, more than with her voice, answered:

"Is it impossible? Tell me!"

"How?" he demanded.

She did not reply, but her fixed look, caressing and cruel, answered him.

"Speak, then, I beg of you!" murmured Camors.

"Have you not told me—I have not forgotten it—that we are united by ties stronger than all others; that the world and its laws exist no longer for us; that there is no other good, no other bad for us, but our happiness or our unhappiness? Well, we are not happy, and if we could be so—listen, I have thought well over it!"

Her lips touched the cheek of Camors, and the murmur of her last words was lost in her kisses.

Camors roughly repelled her, sprang up, and stood before her.

"Charlotte," he said, sternly, "this is only a trial, I hope; but, trial or no, never repeat it—never! Remember!"

She also quickly drew herself up.

"Ah! how you love her!" she cried. "Yes, you love her, it is she you love—I know it, I feel it, and I—I am only the wretched object of your pity, or of your caprice. Very well, go back to her—go and protect her, for I swear to you she is in peril!"

He smiled with his haughty irony.

"Let us see your plot," he said. "So you intend to kill her?"

"If I can!" she said; and her superb arm was stretched out as if to seize a weapon.

"What! with your own hand?"

"The hand shall be found."

"You are so beautiful at this moment!" said Camors; "I am dying with the desire to fall at your feet. Acknowledge only that you wished to try me, or that you were mad for a moment."

She gave a savage smile.

"Oh! you fear, my friend," she said, coldly; then raising again her voice, which assumed a malignant tone, "You are right, I am not mad, I did not wish to try you; I am jealous, I am betrayed, and I shall revenge myself—no matter what it costs me—for I care for nothing more in this world!—Go, and guard her!"

"Be it so; I go," said Camors. He immediately left the salon and the château; he reached the railway station on foot, and that evening arrived at Reuilly.

Something terrible there awaited him.

During his absence Madame de Camors, accompanied by her mother, had gone to Paris to make some purchases. She remained there three days. She had

returned only that morning. He himself arrived late in the evening. He thought he observed some constraint in their reception of him, but he did not dwell upon it in the state of mind in which he was.

This is what had occurred: Madame de Camors, during her stay in Paris, had gone, as was her custom, to visit her aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Their intercourse had always been very constrained. Neither their characters nor their religion coincided. Madame de Camors contented herself with not liking her aunt, but Madame de la Roche-Jugan hated her niece. She found a good occasion to prove this, and did not lose it. They had not seen each other since the General's death. This event, which should have caused Madame de la Roche-Jugan to reproach herself, had simply exasperated her. Her bad action had recoiled upon herself. The death of M. Campvallon had finally destroyed her last hopes, which she had believed she could have founded on the anger and desperation of the old man. Since that time she was animated against her nephew and the Marquise with the rage of one of the Furies. She learned through Vautrot that M. de Camors had been in the chamber of Madame de Campvallon the night of the General's death. On this foundation of truth she did not fear to frame the most odious suspicions; and Vautrot, baffled like her in his vengeance and in his envy, had aided her. A few sinister rumors, escaping apparently from this source, had even crept at this time into Parisian society.

M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallon, suspecting that they had been betrayed a second time by

Madame de la Roche-Jugan, had broken with her; and she could presume that, should she present herself at the door of the Marquise, orders would have been given not to admit her. This affront made her angrier still. She was still a prey to the violence of her wrath when she received a visit from Madame de Camors. She affected to make the General's death the theme of conversation, shed a few tears over her old friend, and kissed the hand of her niece with a burst of tenderness.

"My poor little thing!" she said to her; "it is for you also I weep—for you will yet be more unhappy than heretofore, if that can be possible."

"I do not understand you, Madame," answered the young woman, coldly.

"If you do not understand me, so much the better," replied Madame de la Roche-Jugan, with a shade of bitterness; then, after a moment's pause—"Listen, my dear! this is a duty of conscience which I comply with. You see, an honest creature like you merits a better fate; and your mother too, who is also a dupe. That man would deceive the good God. In the name of my family, I feel bound to ask your pardon for both of them."

"I repeat, Madame, that I do not understand you."

"But it is impossible, my child—come!—it is impossible that all this time you have suspected nothing."

"I suspect nothing, Madame," said Madame de Camors, "because I know all."

"Ah!" continued Madame de la Roche-Jugan, dryly; "if this be so, I have nothing to say. But there are persons, in that case, who can accommodate their consciences to very strange things."

"That is what I thought a moment ago, Madame," said the young woman, rising.

"As you wish, my dear; but I speak in your own interest, and I shall reproach myself for not having spoken to you more clearly. I know my nephew better than you will ever know him; and the other also. Notwithstanding you say so, you do not know all; let me tell you. The General died very suddenly; and after him, it is your turn! Be very careful, my poor child!"

"Oh, Madame!" cried the young woman, becoming ghastly pale; "I shall never see you again while I live!" She left on the instant—ran home, and there found her mother. She repeated to her the terrible words she had just heard, and her mother tried to calm her; but she herself was disturbed. She went immediately to Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and supplicated her to have pity on them and to retract the abominable innuendo she had thrown out, or to explain it more fully. She made her understand that she would inform M. de Camors of the affair in case of need, and that he would hold his cousin Sigismund responsible. Terrified in her turn, Madame de la Roche-Jugan judged the best method was to destroy M. de Camors in the estimation of Madame de Tècle. She related what had been told her by Vautrot, being careful not to compromise herself in the recital. She informed her of

the presence of M. de Camors at the General's house the night of his death. She told her of the reports that were circulated, and mingling calumny with truth, redoubling at the same time her affection, her caresses, and her tears, she succeeded in giving Madame de Tècle such an estimate of the character of M. de Camors, that there were no suspicions or apprehensions which the poor woman, from that moment, did not consider legitimate as connected with him.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan finally offered to send Vautrot to her, that she might herself interrogate him. Madame de Tècle, affecting an incredulity and a tranquillity she did not feel, refused and withdrew.

On her returning to her daughter, she forced herself to deceive her as to the impressions she had received, but she did not succeed; for her anxious face belied her reassuring words. They separated the following night, mutually concealing the trouble and distress of their souls; but accustomed so long to think, feel, and suffer together, they met, so to speak, in the same reflections, the same reasonings, and in the same terrors. They went over, in their memories, all the incidents of the life of Camors—all his faults; and, under the shadow of the monstrous action imputed to him, his faults took a criminal character which they were surprised they had not seen before. They discovered a series and a sequence in his designs, all of which were imputed to him as crimes—even his good actions. Thus his conduct during the last few months, his strange ways, his fancy for his child and for his wife, his assiduous tenderness toward her, were nothing

more than the hypocritical meditation of a new crime —a mask which he was preparing in advance.

What was to be done? What kind of life was it possible to live in common, under the weight of such thoughts? What present—what future? These thoughts bewildered them. Next day Camors could not fail remarking the singular change in their countenances in his presence; but he knew that his servant, without thinking of harm, had spoken of his visit to Madame de Campvallon, and he attributed the coldness and embarrassment of the two women to this fact. He was less disquieted at this, because he was resolved to keep them entirely safe. As a result of his reflections during the night, he had determined to break off forever his intrigue with Madame de Campvallon. For this rupture, which he had made it a point of honor not to provoke, Madame de Campvallon had herself furnished him a sufficient pretext.

The criminal thought she had suggested was, he knew, only a feint to test him, but it was enough to justify his abandonment of her. As to the violent and menacing words the Marquise had used, he held them of little value, though at times the remembrance of them troubled him. Nevertheless, for many years he had not felt his heart so light. This wicked tie once broken, it seemed as if he had resumed, with his liberty, his youth and virtue. He walked and played a part of the day with his little son. After dinner, just as night fell, clear and pure, he proposed to Madame de Camors a *tête-à-tête* excursion in the woods. He spoke to her of a view which had struck him shortly before

on such a night, and which would please, he said laughingly, her romantic taste.

He would not permit himself to be surprised at the disinclination she manifested, at the disquietude which her face indicated, or at the rapid glance she exchanged with her mother.

The same thought, and that a most fearful one, entered the minds of both these unfortunate women at the same moment.

They were still under the impression of the shock which had so weakened their nerves, and the brusque proposition of M. de Camors, so contrary to his usual habits—the hour, the night, and the solitary walk—had suddenly awakened in their brains the sinister images which Madame de la Roche-Jugan had laid there. Madame de Camors, however, with an air of resolution the circumstances did not seem entitled to demand, prepared immediately to go out, then followed her husband from the house, leaving her little son in charge of her mother. They had only to cross the garden to find themselves on the edge of the wood which almost touched their dwelling, and which stretched to the old fields inherited from the Comte de Tècle. The intention of Camors in seeking this *tête-à-tête* was to confide to his wife the decisive determination he had taken of delivering up to her absolutely and without reserve his heart and life, and to enjoy in these solitudes his first taste of true happiness. Surprised at the cold distraction with which his young wife replied to the affectionate gayety of his language, he redoubled his efforts to bring their conversation to

a tone of more intimacy and confidence. While stopping at intervals to point out to her some effects of light and shadow in their walk, he began to question her on her recent trip to Paris, and on the persons she had seen there. She named Madame Jaubert and a few others; then, lowering her voice against her will, mentioned Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

"That one," said Camors, "you could very well have dispensed with. I forgot to warn you that I no longer recognize her."

"Why?" asked she, timidly.

"Because she is a bad woman," said Camors. "When we are a little more intimate with each other, you and I," he added, laughing, "I shall edify you on this character, I shall tell you all—*all*, understand."

There was so much of nature, and even of goodness in the accent with which he pronounced these words, that the Countess felt her heart half comforted from the oppression which had weighed it down. She gave herself up with more abandon to the gracious advances of her husband and to the slight incidents of her walk.

The phantoms disappeared little by little from her mind, and she began to say to herself that she had been the sport of a bad dream, and of a true madness, when a singular change in her husband's face renewed all her terrors. M. de Camors, in his turn, had become absent and visibly preoccupied with some grave care. He spoke with an effort, made half replies, meditated; then stopped quickly to look around him, like a frightened child. These strange ways, so different from his former temper, alarmed the young woman, the more

so as she just then found herself in the most distant part of the wood.

There was an extraordinary similarity in the thoughts which occupied them both. At the moment when Madame Camors was trembling for fear near her husband, he was trembling for her.

He thought he detected that they were followed; at different times he thought he heard in the thicket the cracking of branches, rattling of leaves, and finally the sound of stealthy steps. These noises always ceased on his stopping, and began again the moment he resumed his walk. He thought, a moment later, he saw the shadow of a man pass rapidly among the underwood behind them. The idea of some woodman came first to his mind, but he could not reconcile this with the persistence with which they were followed.

He finally had no doubt that they were dogged—but by whom? The repeated menaces of Madame de Campvallon against the life of Madame de Camors, the passionate and unbridled character of this woman, soon presented itself to his thoughts, suggested this mysterious pursuit, and awakened these frightful suspicions.

He did not imagine for a moment that the Marquise would charge herself personally with the infliction of her vengeance; but she had said—he then remembered—that the hand would be found. She was rich enough to find it, and this hand might now be here.

He did not wish to alarm his wife by calling her attention to this spectre, which he believed at her side, but he could not hide from her his agitation, which

every movement of his caused her to construe as falsely as cruelly.

"Marie," he said, "let us walk a little faster, I beg of you! I am cold."

He quickened his steps, resolved to return to the château by the public road, which was bordered with houses.

When he reached the border of the woods, although he thought he still heard at intervals the sound which had alarmed him; he reassured himself and resumed his flow of spirits as if a little ashamed even of his panic. He stopped the Countess to look at the pretext of this excursion. This was the rocky wall of the deep excavation of a marl-pit, long since abandoned. The arbutus-trees of fantastic shape which covered the summit of these rocks, the pendant vines, the sombre ivy which carpeted the cliffs, the gleaming white stones, the vague reflections in the stagnant pool at the bottom of the pit, the mysterious light of the moon, made a scene of wild beauty.

The ground in the neighborhood of the marl-pit was so irregular, and the thorny underbrush so thick, that when pedestrians wished to reach the nearest highway they were compelled either to make a long détour or to cross the deepest part of the excavation by means of the trunks of two great trees, which had been cut in half, lashed together, and thrown across the chasm. Thus they formed a crude bridge, affording a passage across the deep hollow and adding to the picturesque aspect of this romantic spot.

Madame de Camors never had seen anything like

this peculiar bridge, which had been laid recently at her husband's orders. After they had gazed in silence a moment into the depths of the marl-pit, Camors called his wife's attention to the unique construction.

"Do you intend to cross that?" she asked, briefly.

"Yes, if you are not afraid," said Camors; "I shall be close beside you, you know."

He saw that she hesitated, and, looking at her closely in the moonlight, he thought her face was strangely pale, and could not refrain from saying:

"I believed that you had more courage."

She hesitated no longer, but stepped upon the dangerous bridge. In spite of herself, she turned her head half around, in a backward glance, and her steady step faltered. Suddenly she tottered. M. de Camors sprang forward, and, in the agitation of the moment, seized her in an almost violent grasp. The unhappy woman uttered a piercing shriek, made a gesture as if to defend herself, repelling his touch; then, running wildly across the bridge, she rushed into the woods. M. de Camors, astounded, alarmed, not knowing how to interpret his wife's strange conduct, immediately followed her. He found her a short distance beyond the bridge, leaning against the first tree she had been able to reach. She turned to face him, with an expression of mingled terror and menace, and as he approached, she shot forth the single word:

"Coward!"

He stared at her in sheer amazement. At that moment there was a sound of hurried footsteps; a shadowy form glided toward them from the depth of the thicket,

and the next instant Camors recognized Madame de Tècle. She ran, dishevelled and breathless, toward her daughter, seized her by the hand and, drawing herself up, said to Camors:

"If you kill one of us, kill both!"

He understood the mystery in a flash. A stifled cry escaped him; for an instant he buried his face in his hands; then, flinging out his arms in a gesture of despair, he said:

"So you took me for a murderer!"

There was a moment of dead silence.

"Well!" he cried, stamping his foot with sudden violence, "why do you stay here, then? Run! Fly! Save yourselves from me!"

Overcome with terror, the two women fled, the mother dragging her daughter. The next moment they had disappeared in the darkness of the woods.

Camors remained in that lonely spot many hours, without being aware of the passage of time. At intervals he paced feverishly to and fro along the narrow strip of land between the woods and the bridge; then, stopping short, with fixed eyes, he became lost in thought, and stood as motionless as the trunk of the tree against which he leaned. If, as we hope, there is a Divine hand which measures justly our sorrows according to our sins, the unhappy man, in this dark hour, must have rendered his account.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE next morning the Marquise de Campvallon was strolling beside a large circular sheet of water which ornamented the lower part of her park, the metallic gleam of the rippling waves being discernible from afar through the branches of the surrounding trees.

She walked slowly along the bank of the lake, her head bowed, and the long skirt of her mourning-robe sweeping the grass. Two large and dazzlingly white swans, watching their mistress eagerly, in expectation of receiving their usual titbits from her hands, swam close to the bank, following her steps as if escorting her.

Suddenly the Comte de Camors appeared before her. She had believed that she never should see him again. She raised her head quickly and pressed one hand to her heart.

"Yes, it is I!" said Camors. "Give me your hand."

She gave it to him.

"You were right, Charlotte," he said, after a moment of silence. "Ties like ours can not be broken. I have reflected on everything. I was seized with a momen-

tary cowardice, for which I have reproached myself bitterly, and for which, moreover, I have been sufficiently punished. But I come to you to ask your forgiveness."

The Marquise led him tenderly into the deep shadow of the great plane-trees that surrounded the lake; she knelt before him with theatric grace, and fixed on him her swimming eyes. She covered his head with kisses. He raised her and pressed her to his heart.

"But you do not wish that crime to be committed?" he said in a low voice.

She bent her head with mournful indecision.

"For that matter," he added, bitterly, "it would only make us worthier of each other; for, as to myself, they have already believed me capable of it."

He took her arm and recounted to her briefly the scene of the night before.

He told her he had not returned home, and never should. This was the result of his mournful meditations. To attempt an explanation with those who had so mortally outraged him—to open to them the depth of his heart—to allude to the criminal thought they had accused him of—he had repelled with horror, the evening before, when proposed by another. He thought of all this; but this humiliation—if he could have so abased himself—would have been useless. How could he hope to conquer by these words the distrust capable of creating such suspicions?

He confusedly divined the origin, and understood that this distrust, envenomed by remembrance of the past, was incurable.

The sentiment of the irreparable, of revolted pride, indignation, and even injustice, had shown him but one refuge, and it was this to which he had fled.

The Comtesse de Camors and Madame de Tècle learned only through their servants and the public of the removal of the Count to a country-house he had rented near the Château Campvallon. After writing ten letters—all of which he had burned—he had decided to maintain an absolute silence. They sometimes trembled at the thought he might take away his son. He thought of it; but it was a kind of vengeance that he disdained.

This move, which publicly proclaimed the relations existing between M. de Camors and the Marquise, made a sensation in the Parisian world, where it was soon known. It revived again the strange recollections and rumors that all remembered. Camors heard of them, but despised them.

His pride, which was then exasperated by a savage irritation, was gratified at defying public opinion, which had been so easily duped before. He knew there was no situation one could not impose upon the world providing one had wealth and audacity. From this day he resumed energetically the love of his life, his habits, his labors, and his thoughts for the future. Madame de Campvallon was the confidante of all his projects, and added her own care to them; and both occupied themselves in organizing in advance their mutual existence, hereafter blended forever. The personal fortune of M. de Camors, united to that of the Marquise, left no limits to the fancies which their imag-

ination could devise. They arranged to live separately at Paris, though the Marquise's salon should be common to both; but their double influence would shine at the same time, and they would be the social centre of a sovereign influence. The Marquise would reign by the splendor of her person over the society of letters, art, and politics. Camors would there find the means of action which could not fail to accomplish the high destiny to which his talent and his ambition called him.

This was the life that had appeared to them in the origin of their *liaison* as a sort of ideal of human happiness—that of two superior beings, who proudly shared, above the masses, all the pleasures of earth, the intoxication of passion, the enjoyment of intellectual strength, the satisfaction of pride, and the emotions of power. The *éclat* of such a life would constitute the vengeance of Camors, and force to repent bitterly those who had dared to misunderstand him. The recent mourning of the Marquise commanded them, notwithstanding, to adjourn the realization of their dream, if they did not wish to wound the conscience of the public. They felt it, and resolved to travel for a few months before settling in Paris. The time that passed in their preparations for the future, and in arrangements for this voyage, was to Madame de Campvallon the sweetest period of her life. She finally tasted to the full an intimacy, so long troubled, of which the charm, in truth, was very great; for her lover, as if to make her forget his momentary desertion, was prodigal in the effusion of his tenderness. He brought to private studies, as well as to their common schemes, an ardor, a fire, which displayed

itself in his face, in his eyes, and which seemed yet more to heighten his manly beauty. It often happened, after quitting the Marquise in the evening, that he worked very late at home, sometimes until morning. One night, shortly before the day fixed for their departure, a private servant of the Count, who slept in the room above his master's, heard a noise which alarmed him.

He went down in great haste, and found M. de Camors stretched apparently lifeless on the floor at the foot of his desk. The servant, whose name was Daniel, had all his master's confidence, and he loved him with that singular affection which strong natures often inspire in their inferiors.

He sent for Madame de Campvallon, who soon came. M. de Camors, recovering from his fainting-fit, was very pale, and was walking across the room when she entered. He seemed irritated at seeing her, and rebuked his servant sharply for his ill-advised zeal.

He said he had only had a touch of vertigo, to which he was subject. Madame de Campvallon soon retired, having first supplicated him not to overwork himself again. When he came to her next day, she could not help being surprised at the dejection stamped on his face, which she attributed to the attack he had had the night before. But when she spoke of their approaching departure, she was astonished, and even alarmed by his reply:

"Let us defer it a little, I beg of you," he said. "I do not feel in a state fit for travelling."

Days passed; he made no further allusion to the

voyage. He was serious, silent, and cold. The active ardor, almost feverish, which had animated until then his life, his speech, his eyes, was suddenly quenched. One symptom which disquieted the Marquise above all was the absolute idleness to which he now abandoned himself.

He left her in the evening at an early hour. Daniel told the Marquise that the Count worked no longer; that he heard him pacing up and down the greater part of the night. At the same time his health failed visibly. The Marquise ventured once to interrogate him. As they were both walking one day in the park, she said:

"You are hiding something from me. You suffer, my friend. What is the cause?"

"There is nothing."

"I pray you tell me!"

"Nothing is the matter with me," he replied, petulantly.

"Is it your son that you regret?"

"I regret nothing." After a few steps taken in silence—"When I think," he said, quickly, "that there is one person in the world who considers me a coward—for I hear always that word in my ear—and who treated me like a coward, and who believed it when it was said, and believes it still! If it had been a man, it would be easy, but it was a woman."

After this sudden explosion he was silent.

"Very well; what do you desire?" said the Marquise, with vexation. "Do you wish that I should go and tell her the truth—tell her that you were ready to

defend her against me—that you love her, and hate me? If it be that you wish, say so. I believe if this life continues I shall be capable of doing anything!"

"Do not you also outrage me! Dismiss me, if that will give you pleasure; but I love you only. My pride bleeds, that is all; and I give you my word of honor that if you ever affront me by going to justify me, I shall never in my life see you or her. Embrace me!" and he pressed her to his heart.

She was calm for a few hours.

The house he occupied was about to be taken again by its proprietor. The middle of September approached, and it was the time when the Marquise was in the habit of returning to Paris. She proposed to M. de Camors to occupy the château during the few days he purposed passing in the country. He accepted; but whenever she spoke of returning to Paris——

"Why so soon?" he would say; "are we not very well here?"

A little later she reminded him that the session of the Chamber was about to open. He made his health a pretext for delay, saying that he felt weak and wished to send in his resignation as deputy. She induced him only by her urgent prayer to content himself with asking leave of absence.

"But you, my beloved!" he said, "I am condemning you to a sad existence!"

"With you," she replied, "I am happy everywhere and always!"

It was not true that she was happy, but it was true

that she loved him and was devoted to him. There was no suffering she would not have resigned herself to, no sacrifice she would not make, were it for him.

From this moment the prospect of worldly sovereignty, which she thought she had touched with her hand, escaped her. She had a presentiment of a melancholy future of solitude, of renunciation, of secret tears; but near him grief became a *fête*. One knows with what rapidity life passes with those who busy themselves without distraction in some profound grief —the days themselves are long, but the succession of them is rapid and imperceptible. It was thus that the months and then the seasons succeeded one another, for Camors and the Marquise, with a monotony that left hardly any trace on their thoughts. Their daily relations were marked, on the part of the Count with an invariably cold and distant courtesy, and very often silence; on the part of the Marquise by an attentive tenderness and a constrained grief. Every day they rode out on horseback, both clad in black, sympathetic by their beauty and their sadness, and surrounded in the country by distant respect. About the beginning of the ensuing winter Madame de Campvallon experienced a serious disquietude. Although M. de Camors never complained, it was evident his health was gradually failing. A dark and almost clayey tint covered his thin cheeks, and spread nearly to the whites of his eyes. The Marquise showed some emotion on perceiving it, and persuaded him to consult a physician. The physician perceived symptoms of chronic debility. He did not think it dangerous, but recommended a season at

Vichy, a few hygienic precautions, and absolute repose of mind and body.

When the Marquise proposed to Camors this visit to Vichy, he only shrugged his shoulders without reply.

A few days after, Madame de Campvallon on entering the stable one morning, saw Medjid, the favorite mare of Camors, white with foam, panting and exhausted. The groom explained, with some awkwardness, the condition of the animal, by a ride the Count had taken that morning. The Marquise had recourse to Daniel, of whom she made a confidant, and having questioned him, drew out the acknowledgment that for some time his master had been in the habit of going out in the evening and not returning until morning. Daniel was in despair with these nightly wanderings, which he said greatly fatigued his master. He ended by confessing to Madame de Campvallon the goal of his excursions.

The Comtesse de Camors, yielding to considerations the details of which would not be interesting, had continued to live at Reuilly since her husband had abandoned her. Reuilly was distant twelve leagues from Campvallon, which could be made shorter by a cross-cut. M. de Camors did not hesitate to pass over this distance twice in the same night, to give himself the emotion of breathing for a few minutes the same air with his wife and child.

Daniel had accompanied him two or three times, but the Count generally went alone. He left his horse in the wood, and approached as near as he could without risking discovery; and, hiding himself like a mal-

efactor behind the shadows of the trees, he watched the windows, the lights, the house, the least signs of those dear beings, from whom an eternal abyss had divided him.

The Marquise, half frightened, half irritated, by an oddity which seemed to border on madness, pretended to be ignorant of it. But these two spirits were too accustomed to each other, day by day, to be able to hide anything. He knew she was aware of his weakness, and seemed no longer to care to make a mystery of it.

One evening in the month of July, he left on horseback in the afternoon, and did not return for dinner. He arrived at the woods of Reuilly at the close of the day, as he had premeditated. He entered the garden with his usual precaution, and, thanks to his knowledge of the habits of the household, he could approach, without being noticed, the pavilion where the Countess's chamber was situated, and which was also that of his son. This chamber, by a particular arrangement of the house, was elevated at the side of the court by the height of an *entre-sol*, but was level with the garden. One of the windows was open, owing to the heat of the evening. Camors hid himself behind the shutters, which were half closed, and gazed eagerly into the chamber.

He had not seen for two years either his wife, his child, or Madame de Tècle. He now saw all three there. Madame de Tècle was working near the chimney. Her face was unchanged. She had the same youthful look, but her hair was as white as snow. Ma-

dame de Camors was sitting on a couch nearly in front of the window and undressing her son, at the same time talking to and caressing him.

The child, at a sign, knelt down at his mother's feet in his light night-garments, and while she held his joined hands in her own, he began in a loud voice his evening prayers. She whispered him from time to time a word that escaped him. This prayer, composed of a number of phrases adapted to a youthful mind, terminated with these words: "O God! be good and merciful to my mother, my grandmother, to me—and above all, O God, to my unfortunate father." He pronounced these words with childish haste, but under a serious look from his mother, he repeated them immediately, with some emotion, as a child who repeats the inflection of a voice which has been taught him.

Camors turned suddenly and retired noiselessly, leaving the garden by the nearest gate. A fixed idea tortured him. He wished to see his son—to speak to him—to embrace him, and to press him to his heart. After that, he cared for little.

He remembered they had formerly the habit of taking the child to the dairy every morning to give him a cup of milk. He hoped they had continued this custom. Morning arrived, and soon came the hour for which he waited. He hid himself in the walk which led to the farm. He heard the noise of feet, of laughter, and of joyous cries, and his son suddenly appeared running in advance. He was a charming little boy of five or six years, of a graceful and proud mien. On perceiving M. de Camors in the middle of the walk he

stopped, he hesitated at this unknown or half-forgotten face, but the tender and half-supplicating smile of Camors reassured him.

"Monsieur!" he said, doubtfully.

Camors opened his arms and bent as if to kneel before him.

"Come and embrace me, I beg of you," he murmured.

The child had already advanced smiling, when the woman who was following him, who was his old nurse, suddenly appeared. She made a gesture of fright:

"Your father!" she said, in a stifled voice.

At these words the child uttered a cry of terror, rushed back to the nurse, pressed against her, and regarded his father with frightened eyes.

The nurse took him by the arm, and carried him off in great haste.

M. de Camors did not weep. A frightful contraction distorted the corners of his mouth, and exaggerated the thinness of his cheeks. He had two or three shudderings as if seized with sudden fever. He slowly passed his hand over his forehead, sighed profoundly, and departed.

Madame de Campvallon knew nothing of this sad scene, but she saw its consequences; and she herself felt them bitterly. The character of M. de Camors, already so changed, became after this unrecognizable. He showed her no longer even the cold politeness he had manifested for her up to that period. He exhibited a strange antipathy toward her. He fled from her. She perceived he avoided even touching her hand.

They saw each other rarely now. The health of Camors did not admit of his taking regular meals. These two desolate existences offered then, in the midst of the almost royal state which surrounded them, a spectacle of pity.

In this magnificent park—across these beautiful gardens, with great vases of marble—under long arcades of verdure peopled with more statues—both wandered separately, like two sad shadows, meeting sometimes but never speaking.

One day, near the end of September, Camors did not descend from his apartment. Daniel told the Marquise he had given orders to let no one enter.

"Not even me?" she said. He bent his head mournfully. She insisted.

"Madame, I should lose my place!"

The Count persisted in this mania of absolute seclusion. She was compelled from this moment to content herself with the news she obtained from his servant. M. de Camors was not bedridden. He passed his time in a sad reverie, lying on his divan. He got up at intervals, wrote a few lines, then lay down again. His weakness appeared great, though he did not complain of any suffering.

After two or three weeks, the Marquise read in the features of Daniel a more marked disquietude than usual. He supplicated her to call in the country physician who had once before seen him. It was so decided. The unfortunate woman, when the physician was shown into the Count's apartment, leaned against the door listening in agony. She thought she heard

the voice of Camors loudly raised, then the noise ceased.

The doctor, when departing, simply said to her: "Madame, his sad case appears to me serious—but not hopeless. I did not wish to press him to-day, but he allows me to return to-morrow."

In the night which followed, at two o'clock, Madame de Campvallon heard some one calling her, and recognized the voice of Daniel. She rose immediately, threw a mantle around her, and admitted him.

"Madame," he said, "Monsieur le Comte asks for you," and burst into tears.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter?"

"Come, Madame—you must hasten!"

She accompanied him immediately. From the moment she put her foot in the chamber, she could not deceive herself—Death was there. Crushed by sorrow, this existence, so full, so proud, so powerful, was about to terminate. The head of Camors, turned on the pillow, seemed already to have assumed a death-like immobility. His beautiful features, sharpened by suffering, took the rigid outline of sculpture; his eye alone yet lived and looked at her.

She approached him hastily and wished to seize the hand resting on the sheet.

He withdrew it. She gave a despairing groan. He continued to look fixedly at her. She thought he was trying to speak, but could not; but his eyes spoke. They addressed to her some request, at the same time with an imperious though supplicating expression, which she doubtless understood; for she